sound@Home Project #1 May 2020

Listening to Change by Duncan Chapman

Project outcome: To make a short composition based on the sounds that you hear around you.

Introduction

People have had to limit their movements and activities these past few weeks and as a result, sounds around the world have totally changed. If you live in a town or city close to lots of people you might have noticed there are fewer cars on the roads and hear more sounds from birds and other wildlife.

There have been many reports in the media of animals coming into towns and cities, for example goats have "taken over" the deserted streets of Llandudno in North Wales. If, like me, you live in a rural area the sounds from tractors might have stayed the same but you might hear less aircraft noise, trains in the distance or the sounds from roads.

Another example of the change in sounds at this particular moment in time is at 8pm every Thursday evening as people come out of their houses to thank the NHS. You can hear cheers, claps, the banging of pots, pans, bagpipes and other instruments playing tunes as a celebration. Some towns have even created their own covid rituals, like the people from Belper in Derbyshire who all "moo" out of their windows every night at 6.30pm to bring a little craziness and fun to the residents and to help them feel connected.

The sounds inside your house might have changed too. With children home from school and adults working from home you might be hearing more sounds from phones or other electronic devices. You might be hearing the sounds from your neighbours in the daytime when usually they would be out at work, or you might be struggling to get some peace with everyone inside.

Lots of musicians and sound artists are responding to the coronavirus lockdown by documenting and exploring the way the sound of the world has been changing. Pete Stollery, a Professor of Composition and Electroacoustic Music from the University of Aberdeen (and **sound** chair) has created a sound map on Google Earth which aims to capture sonic environments which have changed as a result of governments' actions around the world to curb the spread of the virus.

Project Notes

- This project invites you to listen to the sounds around you and to make a short composition based on what you hear
- You can do this project on your own or with other people
- Feel free to use this as a starting point, go off on your own journey and make whatever music that you feel inspired to make
- If you are a musician, feel free to write a piece for yourself or other musicians that you live with
- If you are not a musician and have made a piece that you would like played either electronically or by acoustic musicians let us know and we will try to help
- The whole project should take about 4 hours to complete, but you don't need to do it all at once

Like many musicians who collaborate to make their work, I have been using this lockdown time to make new music with people in different places. I've been playing music online with people, playing in my street as well as sending ideas back and forth to people I'm hoping to get together with, as soon as we are able to travel again.

Project Activities

Stage 1: Listening inside
Stage 2: Listening outside
Stage 3: Listening to composing
Stage 4: Playing and sharing your composition

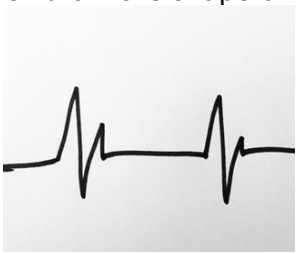
Stage 1: Listening inside

YOU NEED:
Sheets of plain paper
A printed version of the Composition Map Template (optional) see Pg8 below
Something to draw or write with
A timer (like a mobile, or kitchen timer)

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Find a quiet place inside where you won't be disturbed by other people
2. Set a timer on your phone or device for 5 minutes (I prefer to have a fairly quiet sound at the end of the time as an alarm can be a bit jarring)
3. Start the timer and listen to the sounds you can hear during the 5 minutes. Start with the ones in the room you are in and see if you can take your ears on a journey from inside to outside
4. While you are listening for the first time just concentrate on the sounds. Are there any that you didn't expect to hear? Are there any that you haven't noticed before?
5. Set the timer for another 5 minutes and this time while you are listening make a note of what you hear on your paper. You might like to draw the sounds as images of the things that make the sounds, or an image showing the texture or shape of the sound.

For example: you could represent the sound of a ticking clock as an image:

Or draw the shape of the sound the clock makes:



Or write some text: Ticking Alarm Clock

Reflection

You might also like to indicate other characteristics of the sounds you hear on your piece of paper:
Where are sounds, in front, behind, or moving from one place to another?
How loud are they?
Do they stay the same volume or does that change?

Stage 2: Listening Outside

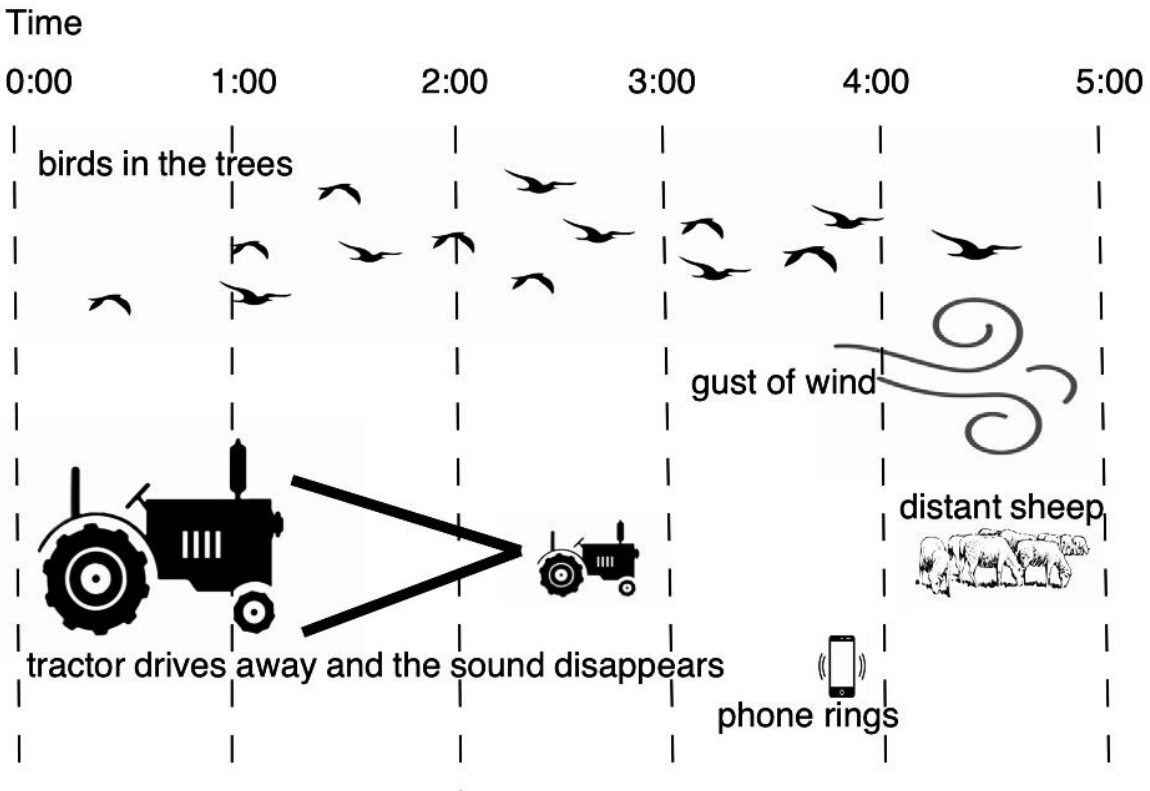
YOU NEED:
Sheets of plain paper
A printed version of the Composition Map Template (optional) see Pg8 below
Something to draw or write with
A timer (like a mobile, or kitchen timer)
A recording device (like a mobile phone or tablet/laptop)

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Repeat the exercise you did indoors only outside. This could be in a garden if you have one, or you could simply open the windows to bring the outside sounds into your room.
2. If possible, record your 5 minute listening (on your phone/tablet/laptop) and save this recording for later.

CHECK THE WEBSITE for video on how to use a mobile phone to record sounds outside.

3. Make another sound drawing or list of the sounds as they happen with an indication of when they happened. Use the Composition Map Template or something similar to help you.
   Some questions to ask yourself:
   What sounds do you notice now?
   Are there any sounds you can hear both inside and outside?

Here's an example of a 5 minute sound map from my garden this afternoon:

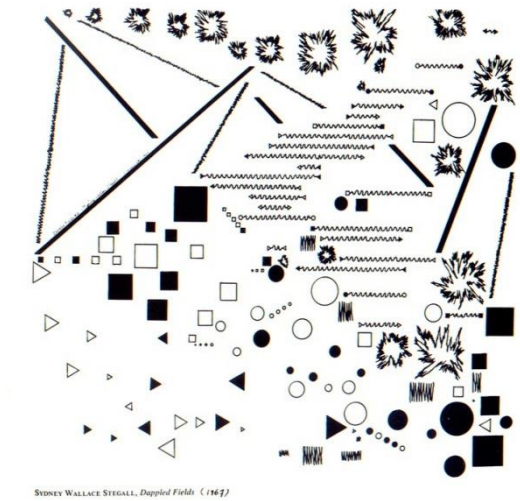


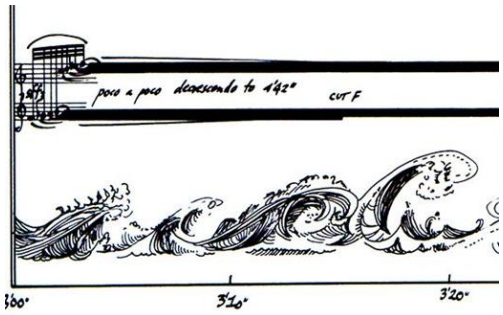
Reflection

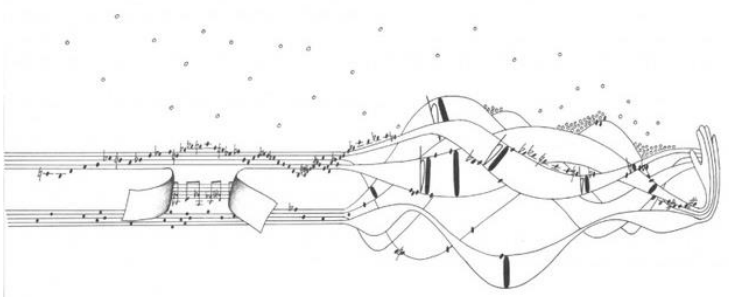
Have a think about how these places sounded before the coronavirus lockdown.
Is your world louder or quieter now?
Are there any sounds that you are now aware of that you missed in the past?
Are there any sounds that you are looking forward to hearing again?
Make some notes on your paper recording your thoughts.

Stage 3 : Listening to composing

1. Taking your drawing and/or recording as a guide, think about how to make a musical or instrumental version of the sounds you heard during your recording. Think about the following elements:
   - Pitch: how high or low you want your notes to be
   - Rhythm: the pattern of the sounds or notes
   - Dynamics: the volume, or how loud or soft you want your piece to be
2. If you made a recording of your listening, play it back to yourself using headphones and experiment by copying what you hear with an instrument, your voice, or tapping on something. A good way of doing this is to listen the recording several times so you learn and remember what happens and when. Continue to make notes about what you are doing and playing.
3. When you have a feel for the shape of your piece, make a recording of you playing your new sounds with the recording (you might need to borrow someone else's phone if you used yours to make the first recording). Your piece could be in the form of this recording or you could notate what you played so you can perform it later. Do whatever feels comfortable for you.
4. If you made a drawing of your sounds, have a go at transcribing it for instruments. This could be an acoustic version, on a computer or a graphic form. Here are some examples of graphic scores:







If you are a musician, you could use more conventional notation and annotate your sounds into a musical score. You could also mix the recording with playing or singing or if you have a computer edit parts of the recording to make new material. We like Audacity.
CHECK THE WEBSITE for a link to Audacity software.

Example Score: Rural Scene with Red Arrows

Here's an example of a piece I wrote using a recording as a starting point.

The recording was part of a Sonic Postcard made with a group of young people in Welton in Lincolnshire just up the road from where I live. A characteristic of the soundscape of this place is the combination of rural sounds (tractors, birdsong, wind in trees) with aeroplanes. Next to Welton is RAF Scampton where The Red Arrows are based. For this postcard we recorded the jets taking off from the edge of the runway (making sure we pressed play before they flew away). The sound of 6 Hawk Jets taking off at the same time was enough to set off a car alarm.

CHECK THE WEBSITE to listen to Duncan's Whelton Postcard and Rural and Red Arrows Quartet Version pieces.

If you read music and want to follow the score whilst listening, please see the music on Pg6 & Pg7 of this download.

Stage 4: Playing and sharing your composition

When you have finished your piece, make a recording of it and email participate@sound-scotland.co.uk to be considered for sharing on **sound's** SoundCloud channel. (Depending on the amount of pieces we receive we might not be able to feature all of them.) Please try to save your file as an MP3 or WAV file, which most software will do automatically, but we'll try to accept files in any format.

Please email your piece by 25 May 2020. Look out for the next composition project at the beginning of June. If you have any questions about this project please contact our Learning & Participation Manager Ellen by emailing: participate@sound-scotland.co.uk

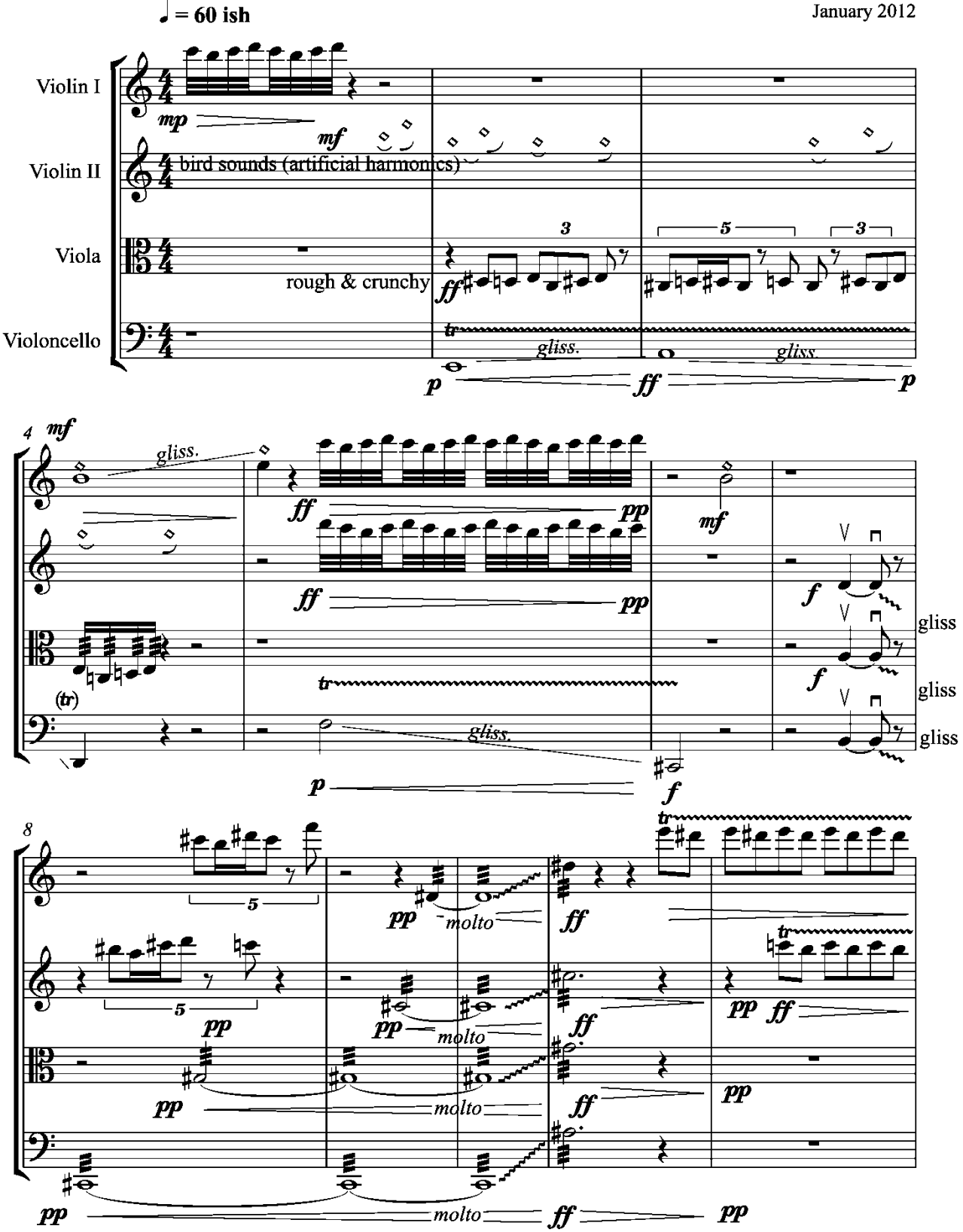
Further Exploration

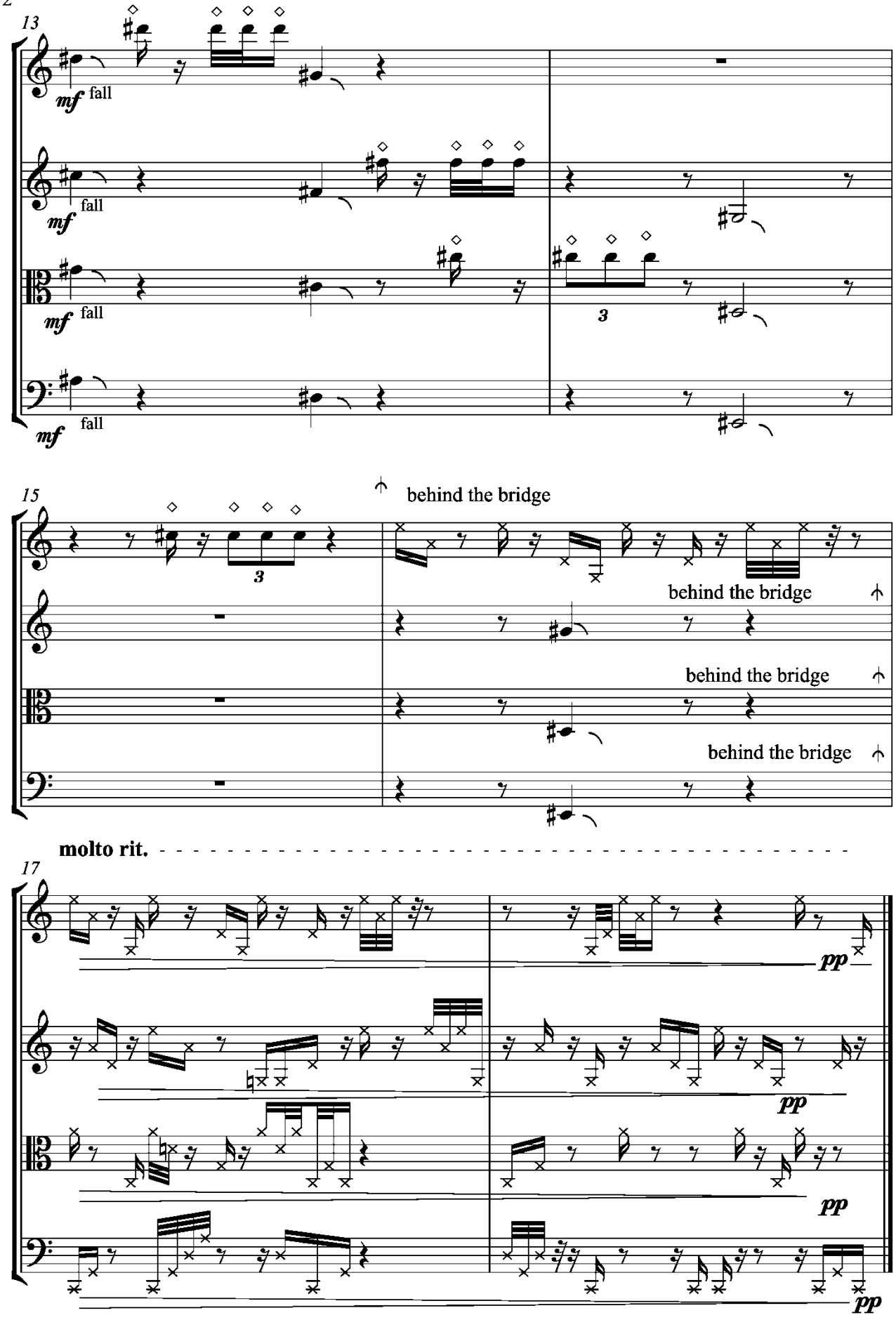
CHECK THE WEBSITE for a link to Pete Stollery's COVID-19 Sound Map.
The "Belper Moo" we mentioned earlier is featured on the map, can you find it?
Feel free to upload your own recording of sounds from where you live to the map. Instructions are on the link.

There are links to other websites documenting sounds along with suggestions for exploring music and recommended apps on the COVID-19 LOCKDOWN page at **https://sound-scotland.co.uk/**

Rural scene with Red Arrows

Duncan Chapman
January 2012





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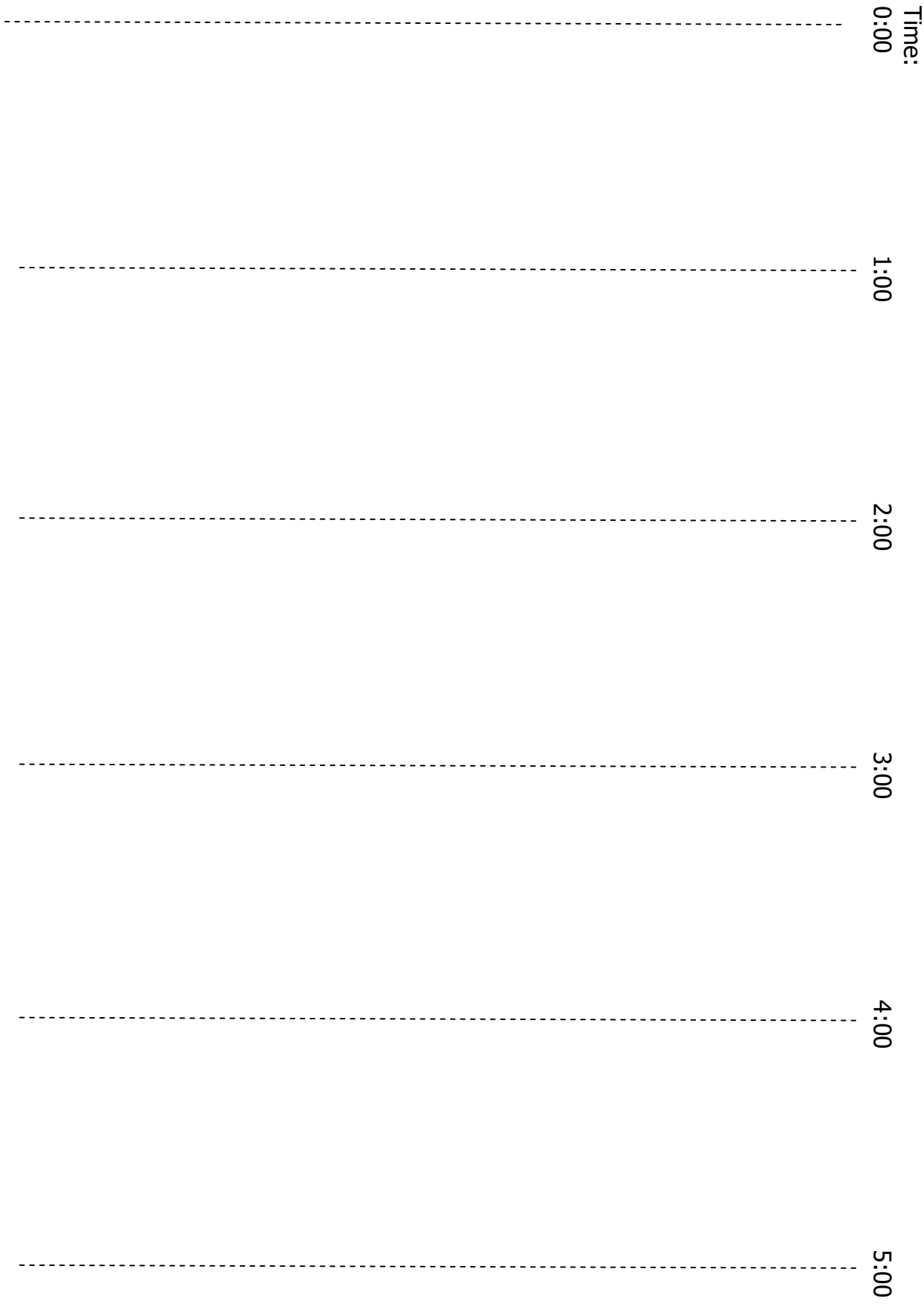
Composition Map Template

OPTIONAL: Use this template to help you document your outside listening exercise.



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