

BATTER! BATTER! BOOM! (v2)

R4 INTRO

Now on BBC Radio 4: our series, ART OF NOW. This time, the radio producer Steve Urquhart meets some of Scotland's newest "sound artists" – and discovers how and why they've become so excited by sound – in 'BATTER! BATTER! BOOM!'

0'00" CHRISTINE

FX WINDOW OPENS

STEVE: So, what do you hear?

CHRISTINE: That's definitely traffic isn't it? Or is it the trains? Is it the wind? [FOOTSTEPS, a crow] That's someone walking!

Glasgow... west of the city centre.

Wait – there is something really cool, do you want to hear it? Like the wind or something – it's like "kwoooooooooo"!

I'm with Christine, who's leaning out the window, wearing headphones, and trying out sound recording for the very first time...

CHRISTINE: (whispers) That's the best thing!

STEVE: You look quite excited!

CHRISTINE: I am very excited!

STEVE: Why?!

CHRISTINE: It's cos, I don't notice these things every single day! I walk on the streets and I don't really pay attention to the sounds of the birds, or people laughing – it's crazy! Can you hear them? Oh my God, that's amazing! Wow!

FX FADES UNDER

1'17" OPENING – PROJECT ABILITY

ESME: Batter, batter, boom... Batter, batter, boom... Batter, batter, boom...

A few miles away, on the other side of Glasgow...

ESME: Batter, batter, boom... maraca shakers, echo echo echo... seagull, thunder, wind...

A group of people, sitting in a room, listening to... some sounds.

JIM: Rhubarb, laughter, snap...

ESME: Ribbing, rattle, flapping...

And attempting to describe these sounds.

Wax removal... pebbles inside a hollow tub.

They're saying what they can hear... but...

...washing machine...

...there's no washing machine, no thunder, no pebbles.

ESME: ...wang, strum, strum, twang, strum, strum... yeah, that was all I got basically!

The members of this group actually created this “composition” – it's made entirely of stuff they found in a cupboard, and recorded. Here's how the objects sounded before they were modified.

CUPBOARD SOUNDS + REACTIONS...

LUKE: Post- making effects aside, it was all done with elastic bands and beads and tubes and tubs...

JO: And salad spinners!

MORAG: Elastic band farts!...

LUKE: There's a lot of salad spinner in there! (laughs)

FX SALAD SPINNER

JO: No, it was all literally from the “create cupboards”...

ESME: The sounds of the create cupboard! (LAUGHTER)

3'27" MARYHILL DJs

TALKING FADES IN

Elsewhere in the city, in Maryhill, another group of people – newly arrived in Scotland.

..... OK, let's go. (whistle)

They too are about to discover the joys of experimenting with sound.

DOOR FX

Their mission: to go outdoors, find stuff that makes a noise, and record it.

MOUSSA – SPEAKS IN PALESTINIAN ARABIC

Moussa strums a gate...

STRUM FX

...while Sami tries something with his shoes on the pavement.

SCRATCHING FX

Marouane joins in – banging on a bin!

SCRATCHING + BANGING ON BIN FX

...(laughter) it's amazing innit?! Yeah! (fades)

4'40" CHRISTINE

Meanwhile – Christine is still hanging out of the window...

CHRISTINE: Can you hear them laughing? That's so cute!

FX FADES UNDER

CHRISTINE: I'm Christine... and I'm currently a student. I came to Glasgow five years ago, and I'm from DRC, that's the centre of Africa. I came from a very, very tiny place, compared to Glasgow. It's so different compared to where I came from.

CENTRAL AFRICA BIRDSONG FX

Like, in the mornings, when you get up, you hear birds – like, KA KA KA KA! Something like that. Whereas here, I'm woken up by the sound of cars!

STEVE: Did you find it was a loud place when you came here, then?

FX GLASGOW NIGHT OUT

CHRISTINE: Yes. Glasgow sounded very loud. Very, very loud. Mostly on Friday nights. Like, even if in my house I can hear people outside, probably talking to their friends, screaming to their friends! (laughs) But in a lovely way, not like causing trouble or something. Yeah, so, it's very loud compared to where I come from.

FX FADES IN

CHRISTINE: What is that? There is something that sounds like waves, can you hear that? Like water? I don't know what it is, but it sounds good. Is it cars?! (laughs) It does sound different to hear that! Hmm, OK..... this is actually really cool! It's gonna make me think about sounds more.

6'16" SIOBHAIN

SIOBHAIN: When you stop and listen to stuff, like, everyday things..... It just takes ten minutes of really intense listening to all the sounds that are going on, and then, you notice everything!

That's Siobhain Ma. She's been working with Christine – and with other young people of colour – to create and produce sound art.

AUDIO: We Are The Same, We Are the World

SIOBHAIN: This is a piece we made with the 16+ programme – which is mostly young unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees, based at Glasgow Clyde College.

AUDIO: We Are The Same, We Are the World

SIOBHAIN: We got them to talk about how different sounds can make you feel. And then, we kind of were just like – let’s just go outside and record stuff. And they looked really excited. It was quite chaotic but nice. And I think everyone was really happy to get out of the classroom! But there was, like, people crouching down recording... cars going past, or trying to record birds...

AUDIO: We Are The Same, We Are the World

SIOBHAIN: ... and then we took everyone into the computer room, and we were just like, just look up sounds that you like. And then we gathered them all.

AUDIO: We Are The Same, We Are the World (cat miaow... music)

Siobhain’s been running these “sound-making workshops” with her long-time friend and collaborator, Cass *Ezeji. [uh-ZED-jee]

SIOBHAIN: Cass and I are very... we definitely wanted to work with young people of colour – especially other women of colour – because... we felt like they actually don’t get an opportunity to speak for themselves, or make their own work in a way that’s not framed around their stories and their journeys.

AUDIO: We Are The Same, We Are the World

SIOBHAIN: A lot of the time, when people work with refugee and asylum seeker groups, it’s, so much of it’s about THAT part of their lives. And we really didn’t want it to be about that, we just wanted it to be – this is just about you, and about what you like, it’s a celebration of that. It’s just a fun thing. That – that stuff is just as important in what makes up a person, as all the really intense and traumatic stuff. They’re all young people, and that’s the stuff in their day to day life. Oh it’s gone very quiet. A hairdryer! (laughs)

SIOBHAIN: Ordinary things that you wouldn’t normally think about, just taking a moment to appreciate them – I think that is one of the really nice things about working with sounds, generally – it’s developing that sense of hearing in a whole different way.

AUDIO: Possilpark to Cove Park

Over in Possilpark, in North Glasgow, members of a group called ‘Young People’s Futures’ are playing me sounds they’ve recorded – and then “altered”.

GROUP: Chiuwawa..... (laughs) It sounds like a handle, that’s like really old, opening and shutting, opening and shutting... sounds like a window wiper... it sounds like a creepy door... sounds like someone’s doing something with electrical wires, like, trying to hotwire a car or something! There’s the car exploding, it went wrong! (laughs)... I think, see the one that you think’s a dog? It could be creaky floorboards.

AUDIO: Possilpark to Cove Park

MIRRIN: I like how at the end, it gets slower, and then it just fades away and things, it’s nice.

That’s Mirrin, who’s 10. She explains to me what the sounds ACTUALLY are.

MIRRIN: The bell noise is actually like a bottle smashing off a wall, and it was edited...

STEVE: So there was no bell?

MIRRIN: There was no bell.

STEVE: It was a bottle?

MIRRIN: It was a bottle. (BOTTLE FX) That’s – that’s the bottle...

DUNCAN: We slowed it down, shall we speed it up, so you can hear what it started as?

MIRRIN: Yeah.

Mirrin and her friends are guided by a sound artist, Duncan Chapman – but it’s the young people themselves that lead the creative process.

DUNCAN: You’ve got – the other sounds are on there as well...

MIRRIN: Yeah, um – I also standed on some, like, wet leaves... and then... I did a car... And then I did... oh, that’s the, that’s the fence that I did... there was this fence, and I was

scooping my hand on it. And, I thought the sound sounded really nice. That's the seagulls. I just went out, and then I found all these things, and I started using them.

STEVE: And was it fun mixing it, and pressing the different buttons and stuff, was that fun?

MIRRIN: Yeah – that's really fun.

STEVE: Why?

MIRRIN: Because I got to experiment with it, and see all the different things I could use in it.

DUNCAN: Do you remember how to stop them all?!

MIRRIN: Er, yeah! (FX STOPS) That's all my noises!

STEVE: So, where are we?

KIARA: Possil.

STEVE: And where is Possil?

KIARA: In Glasgow.

STEVE: And, if you were to go outside, what would you see when you go outside?

OLIVIA: Like, all different kinds of houses, so, like your tenements, 4x4s, in a specific housing estate.

KIARA: There's a lot of glass bottles.

FX POSSILPARK WALK

DYLON: We just walked a route, and decided to record what we found... just found stuff that was in the public, local to here.

FX POSSILPARK WALK

DYLON: If you know where to look, you'll find the beauty behind it. To people who haven't really spent time here, it just looks like a mess. People don't like it. But, if you've stayed here all your life, you'll learn to know where to look. People that stay here actually enjoy staying here. It's got a bad reputation, but it really shouldn't.

AUDIO: Possilpark to Cove Park

OLIVIA: It's just like, finding the beauty in all the darkest of places. Like, the light in the dark. So, if there's a lot of rubbish you can make some beautiful noises, and make some beautiful art with it, and stuff.

AUDIO: Possilpark to Cove Park

STEVE: Do you like living here?

MIRRIN: Yeah – there are some bits that are really, really beautiful.

STEVE: Even if it's pouring with rain?

MIRRIN: Yeah. It looks really nice when it's raining!

FX RAIN

14'00" PROJECT ABILITY

FX RAIN STICK

JO: We asked people to bring in some kind of instrument, or sound making object... One person brought a rain stick, someone else brought a violin... and, just got them to explore it. And then we got them into pairs, and got one of them to play whatever they brought in, and the other person to write in response – and then swap.

FX RAIN STICK & VIOLIN & CREATIVE WRITING CLASS

"The water, the rustle of the trees, blowing, such a beautiful delight. We wake at dawn and sneak out of the dormitory, while everyone is asleep..."

This is Project Ability – just east of the city centre.

LUKE: Project Ability is one of the most magical spaces in Glasgow – it's a studio space for people with disabilities or lived experience of mental ill health, from age 5 up until their 80s, to make art.

Luke Shaw and Joanna Peace run creative workshops here, that focus on reading, writing... and – increasingly – sound.

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 workshop

JO: The writing is very intimidating, often – people come with baggage from school, and preconceived ideas. And I think, with the sound, we've found, almost that the equipment – so, the having the headphones on, the microphone – it gives you this other persona, and maybe confidence, to go and explore.

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 composition "CLICK!"...

LUKE: When we introduced recording equipment, suddenly people didn't necessarily want to engage with the writing exercise, but wanted to take a recorder around the building, and find very specific noises, and bring them back to the group to listen to, and to talk about.

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 composition "CRUMPLE!"...

JANE: The thing about sound is, it's just really accessible! I had my doubts about it, you know, what's this gonna be? But it's a way to be musical without actually having to understand anything about music. That sense of discovery, of going in – is there a rhythm here? What's happening here? Can I use this? Why do I like that?

That's Jane, who's been experimenting with sound at Project Ability. So has Alan:

ALAN: It's another landscape. I've done a few painting landscapes, and to actually go into the sound landscapes, there's depth, and openness, and valleys, and – it's really important for me to listen.

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 composition – layers of texture...

JANE: I enjoy making layers of texture, that's what I like. And this is all about layering sound and texture. It hasn't been... how can I put it? I hate it when things are patronising. Sometimes you can find that, a little bit – you know – tell me about what's happened to me, tell me about your problems... whereas with this, it's just like – can I make a joyous noise here? Yeah, that'd be dead good. You know?

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 composition

WATER SWOOSHING

JANE: And also, movement can be difficult for me at times, so things I can do while sitting down?! Erm... I'm finding it actually very satisfying.

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 composition

JANE: Whirr whirr whirr... pad pad pad... fishy pad fishy pad where's the fishy pad...

JANE: I find it difficult to go places that I don't know. I will isolate myself. But I can come here, and I can say to my friend – you gonna be there before me? Yes. So we've got that group dynamic, where I feel safe... and we've got different experiences, within which, again, I feel quite safe... but... it means a lot to me. And I can't really explain to you more than that, without bursting into tears and being over emotional. It's all about the freedom of expression, the freedom of creativity. My brain's moving, my brain's thinking... it's just lovely! It's just lovely.

AUDIO: Project Ability 2017 composition

JANE: Rustle rustle! Pad pad pad... step step step..... (FADES)

19'00" RADIOPHRENIA

So... who gets to hear this work? Apart from you, right now, on Radio 4?

RADIOPHRENIA JINGLE

Generally, it's tucked away online, in podcasts that you'd need to go looking for... but not always. There are radio stations that live and breathe this sort of thing.

"Radiophrenia – the light at the end of the dial"

SIOBHAIN: Radiophrenia is a temporary, pop-up arts radio station, in Glasgow. It runs 24-hour broadcasts for two weeks, of sound art and experimental radio from all over the world.

MARK: The idea of it is to challenge people's expectations of what radio is, and can be... and really, a kind of space, on air, for people, artists, anyone... to play.

BARRY: A lot of what we broadcast will irritate, annoy, and people will turn off. But equally, I think people will find stuff that they hadn't considered... and will be curious.

MARK: If people just consider it to be some kind of, like, pretentious, high art thing that makes people, erm.....

STEVE: Is it a pretentious high art thing, Radiophrenia?

MARK: No! We don't think so! (laughs) But I guess that's for listeners to tell us!

Mark Vernon and Barry Burns started Radiophrenia four years ago, with support from Creative Scotland. Each broadcast aims to reach further beyond the usual "sound art" types.

BARRY: We're always on the lookout for people who... aren't us! To make it something different.

MARK: There has always been an open call. Which is open to everyone. But it doesn't reach everyone, or, not everyone thinks "this is for me" – which is part of the reason for us doing the workshops... that's brought in a lot more people from different community groups.

*RADIOPHRENIA JINGLE "Radiophrenia 87.9FM – the light at the end of the dial"
"Hi! I'm Christine. In these recordings, we hope to share some advice to the young people who have just arrived in the city. We hope you enjoy!..." MULTIPLE VOICES...*

JANE: I normally listen to Radio 4 until it makes me angry, and I'll listen to Radio 3 and they do whispering and that's nice... but Radiophrenia, I enjoyed the plinky plonky plinky stuff, and then a piece would come on that you had to listen to – sometimes a story, sometimes an expression, documentary – different types of sound, and different types of meaning. And it wasn't just all the narrative stuff.

AUDIO: Doog Cameron – Wild & Tame pt1 (extract)

DYLON: I enjoy listening to sounds more than words, because – it's hard to explain, but – words, in my head, it's just annoying trying to think what they mean. Whereas sounds, you can try and think of what they are. So, just that, really.

22'40" POSSIL KIDS ON RADIOPHRENIA

MIRRIN: You're listening to Radiophrenia on 87.9FM.

KIARA: And now it's time for Possilpark to Cove Park.

The group from Possilpark are now getting their first, scary taste of live broadcasting – introducing their own work on the radio.

(MIRRIN: This is a sequence of sounds, recorded and produced by Young People's Futures – a group based in Possilpark in North Glasgow.)

HELEN: So Mirrin, can you tell me a bit about how you went about recording the sounds?

MIRRIN: Erm, we were just looking around Possilpark, and we found all these, like, squeaky doors. We found bottles, and all the really cool sounds in puddles... yeah.

CLIP of POSSILPARK TO COVE PARK

KIARA: Who are you?

ANNE-MARIE: I'm Anne-Marie Timoney, and I work for Young People's Futures.

KIARA: And what's happening today, where are we?

ANNE-MARIE: We are in Radiophrenia's studio, on Sauchiehall Street, and you young people are all speaking on the radio. And you're all having fun!

CLIP of POSSILPARK TO COVE PARK fades out

DYLON and NIAMH: "That was 'POSSILPARK TO COVE PARK'. The pieces we heard were called: Landscape Sonification, Stormy Day, It's Windy, Objects and Voices, Japanese Landscape, Sounding....."

STEVE (whispered): How was that?

DYLON: (whispered): It was fun! It was a bit scarier than I thought, but it was good! I didn't think I would get through it, but I did!

STEVE: (whispered): What about you, did you enjoy that?

NIAMH: (whispered): It was terrifying!

STEVE: (whispered): But, good terrifying or bad terrifying?

NIAMH: (whispered): Just terrifying!

DYLON: Can we tell how many people are listening in?

DYLON: There's hundreds of people listening? (laughs) Wow! I definitely didn't think I was ever able to do that!

STEVE: Why not?!

DYLON: Because, I get – big stage fright. Like, I knew people were listening, but I didn't know how many, so... it didn't feel as bad. I can speak in front of my class, but when it comes to speaking in front of a whole school, I just – I can't speak. So... microphone right in my face – it kind of put me off at first, but once I started speaking, that was me – I'm fine. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be... I don't know how to explain it, but... because it wasn't that bad, I could do it more! (laughs)

25'04" MARYHILL INTEGRATION NETWORK

MARYHILL DJs

For us, it's a new thing. When we started, honestly – ok, what's this?! (laughter) What is going for – what the fun of this? But, when we hear what we done... now, to be honest, now we find the fun! (laughter)

MARYHILL DJs

25'45" ENDING

BARRY: Art kind of has this association with intellectualism, and theory, and – the thing is, a lot of this is actually fun! It's fun to do, and it's fun to listen to. So, I would accentuate the playfulness.

AUDIO CLIP

STEVE: And what is sound art?

SIOBHAIN: That is a very good question! It's a difficult one to answer, and I've tried to explain to many people what sound art is. I think that it's just – it's hard to explain what it is! I think it's not – it's not like a standard piece of music, there's no singing or anything like that involved, erm...

ALAN: (singing) "Is it a kind of a dream..."

SIOBHAIN: ...but then it could be – I don't know, it's very hard!

ALAN: *(singing) "Floating out on the tide... following the river of death downstream..."*

SIOBHAIN: It's a lot of things. But then it's also – it's none of those things! I don't know!

ALAN: *(singing) "Oh is it a dream?..."*

SIOBHAIN: How do you explain it?! (laughs)

ALAN: *(singing) "Oh-oh, is it a dream?..."*

SIOBHAIN: However long I've been doing this for, and I still don't really know.

ALAN: *(singing) "Bright eyes, burning like fire..... Bright eyes." (to end of chorus)*

STEVE: And this is sound art?

MARK: Yep!

STEVE: Who says?

MARK: Whoever made it. If they think it is, then it is.

27'37" ENDS

R4 OUTRO

'ART OF NOW: BATTER! BATTER! BOOM!' was presented and produced – in Glasgow – by Steve Urquhart. It was a Boom Shakalaka production for BBC Radio 4.