

WHENITWAS

field effects

I attended a very cool live ambient sound / field recordings concert last night. Part of the "Field Effects" series, it was put on by Aaron at quietamerican.org. It was quite a novel listening experience, with the audience relaxing on futons, bean bag chairs, and couches while the performers created soundscapes using a variety of field recordings, samples and even ambient sound taken from a mic that they had hanging out on the roof onto the street!

I particularly enjoyed the set by [Bernhard Gal](#). His excellent performance incorporated a wide variety of sounds - from atmospheric sounds, to cut up / mixed up pieces of human speech, to what sounded like recordings from an arcade somewhere in Asia.

It was a really new and interesting listening experience for me, very different from the kind of listening I do as a musician. Especially as a Jazz musician, I'm conditioned to search for structure and recurring themes in music. This was a completely different experience... It's not as though the performances lacked structure or theme (they had both) but the path was definitely less well marked. At first the experience felt confusing and challenged my patience, but in time I was able to loosen my analytical grip and enjoy the variety of sounds and freedom of imagination that the performances offered. Free of meter, free of the restrictions of musical harmony, it was a treat to *relax, and just listen!*

So for my first posting "live from San Francisco" I thought I'd give you a listen to some of the sounds I've been hearing around the SF Conservatory while waiting for Beth to get out of classes and whatnot.

» [Conservatory Courtyard - San Francisco](#) [mp3]

Recorded while sitting in the conservatory's courtyard, hear the confluence of musicians practicing, people chatting and sounds from the urban environment.

P.S. - In July I was thrilled to have one of the recordings I made in Munich included in Aaron's "[One Minute Vacations](#)" series. If you're interested in exploring more of what ambient field recordings have to offer, his collection is one of the best. Spare just sixty seconds from your day and let yourself be transported to another time and place. Really fantastic. Oh, and use headphones to get the full stereo immersive experience.

Posted by John on Sep 19, 2004

munich's englischer garten

It's late in the afternoon, July, 2003, and my father, brother and I are wandering Munich's expansive [Englischer Garten](#). This ambient recording was made as we approached the famous Chinese Pagoda beer garden to [slake our thirst](#) due to the record setting Summer temperatures.

Hear the German band play from atop the pagoda, the clink of glasses and the merriment of Munich's citizens and visitors escaping the afternoon heat with a [refreshing stein](#) or two or three.

» [Chinese Pagoda Beer Garden - Munich](#) [mp3]

Visiting Munich was wonderful - I hope to return someday.

Posted by John on Jul 13, 2004

oregon coast kiting

Beth and I took a quick trip out to the Oregon coast this past Sunday, and it was glorious. We headed out towards Cannon Beach, but actually ended up spending all our time at the beaches at [Arcadia](#) and [Hug Point](#). (Check out the panoramas the Park Service has for those beaches - pretty cool!)

We reached the coast in the early afternoon and it was fogged in pretty solidly - however after about half an hour of exploring Arcadia beach, the fog burned off and it was sunny and blue! Walking the beach was wonderful, as it was fairly warm and humid and the ocean was calm. The sand at the edge of the surf was smooth and reflected light like a mirror. Incredible!

I had my sport kite with me and while the winds were quite light at first, I was able to get the kite up after some tweaking to the bridle and standoffs.

Wow, do I enjoy flying on the beach! It was great! I rolled my pants up a bit and flew with my feet in the surf. You can't do

much better than that! I was having such a good time, a couple hours slipped by in no time. Thanks to Beth, here are a few video clips of me flying:

[Clip one](#) [6.5mb avi]

[Clip two](#) [5.5mb avi]

For any low-bandwidth people out there, I apologize about the filesize - those are straight off Beth's digital camera. We have a bunch of gorgeous photos too. I'll let you know when we have those uploaded. What a great Sunday getaway!

Posted by John on Jun 24, 2004

sitting for a living (updated)

On my trip down to the California coast this weekend (for my sister's high school graduation and my uncle's wedding) I clipped on a pedometer that my folks had laying around. It's been interesting seeing an actual number of steps attached to my activities. "Went to the beach for a couple thousand steps today..."

Now, I've only worn it for a few days now, but even after just one day at the office I'm surprised to see how little I walk at work. Here are the numbers so far, and a few notable steps from each day:

Fri: 14,040 - Flew kites on the beach!

Sat: 12,424 - Uncle D's wedding in Sunnyvale.

Sun: 9,408 - Family walk on the beach, flew home.

Mon: 4,408 - Back to work!

I'll give it a couple more days here at work to see what a "middle of the road" number of steps are, but I suspect that overall it'll stay pretty low. (As I type this I've only taken 191 steps from my bed till being here at my computer at work. What a weird thought.) It's definitely an eye opener, though. I think I'm going to start taking walks more regularly in the evening instead of letting myself take a crash nap - especially with the summer Oregon weather!

Update! Here are the numbers from this past week, just to make it painfully obvious how much my ass stays in the chair on weekdays:

Tuesday: 2,571 - Work.

Wednesday: 3,532 - More work, left the office for lunch.

Thursday: 1,771 - Skipped lunch.

Friday: 3,149 - Burgerville for lunch.

Saturday: 11,430 - Biked downtown.

Sunday: 10,384 - Beach day trip with Beth!

Posted by John on Jun 15, 2004

quick stop home

Not last weekend, but the weekend before, Beth and I took a quick trip to California so she could audition for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and so I could visit with my family and friends. It was great getting a chance to go home for the first time in six months or so (miss those college breaks...) and the weather couldn't have been better.

Glad I was able to catch the coastside [robots](#) for a burrito, and especially enjoyed the couple hours I spent on the beach with Ton, Hav and Bethy trying to dig a huge tire out of the sand with our bare hands. We also drove down to Santa Cruz to visit with my bro, had an evening walk at [Natural Bridges](#) and dinner at a great chinese place. I also got to visit with Grandma and Grandpa, which was fun. All in all it was very refreshing, and I was genuinely sad to have to leave so soon.

I'd like to introduce something new to the site - ambient sound recordings that I've been making. Here's one from my collection that I recorded while on this trip:

» [Montara Birds](#) [mp3]

This one minute ambient recording was made at my folks place in Montara, California while I was sitting quietly in the sunny woods. Listen closely and you'll hear not only the birds but the wind, surf, and even the foghorn in the distance. (The loud bird calls at the end are the Red Tailed Hawks that are nesting high in a tree in the yard.) I recommend using headphones for a fully immersive stereo experience.

Posted by John on Mar 24, 2004

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About

Whenitwas is the weblog and journal of John Vollmer, who is currently living in the San Francisco Bay Area.

If you get a chance, feel free to say "Hello!" by sending an email to **hello** beep **whenitwas** beep **com!** (I'll leave it up to you to translate that into a real email address. Who says humans aren't smarter than robots?)

Beachbox

The beachbox is a little piece of public canvas. It's a place where you can leave your mark in the sand. Er... on the web.

Currently in the beachbox:

beachball antics

fantastic sounds

Want to participate?

- » [Edit the beachbox!](#) [pop-up]

Places to Visit

Here are some places I think are worth checking out:

My Projects:

- » [the robot hq](#)
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Friends & Family:

- » [duvander.com](#)
- » [joshheumann.com](#)
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