

Sound Escapes

By Joel Lyons

Wish you were hear?

Raindrops pitter-patter on a poncho as waves crash onto a beach. Pigs squeal and dogs bark in a crowded market. A concert of croaking frogs consumes the night. These are just a few of the sonic postcards of Vietnam created by Aaron Ximm. On his website, www.quietamerican.org, Ximm has also included recordings of bell-wearing water buffalo, cicadas singing by a brook and the gurgling of a hotel room faucet.

Ximm's work is, and yet isn't, simply recording everyday sounds for audio playback. But there's a reason for it. Ximm wants the world to recognize and appreciate the sounds and experiences that surround them. Through his audio artwork, he encourages active listening and activating the imagination.

Ximm credits his outsider artist step-brother for being influential in how he hears the world. "He was the first person who encouraged me to listen with open ears. He really showed me how open the door really is to making instead of simply consuming," says Ximm.

"The heightened attention that comes with being in an unfamiliar place does wonders for your appreciation of your environment, and sound is no exception. I think it was (during my trip to Vietnam) that my love of traveling fused permanently with the idea of active listening."

The recordings come from a number of Ximm's travels to countries such as Laos and Burma, and from San Francisco, where he lives. His love for traveling was the inspiration for the One Minute Vacations series on his website. Ximm receives submissions from other travelers that take listeners on a trip that helps them focus on something other than their immediate surroundings. Submissions have come in from Europe, Mexico, India and other distant locales.

"I hope," he explains, "that the act of intentional listening will take people mentally—I might even say psychically—somewhere else," he says. He notes the brief length of the recordings contributes to the difficulty in getting a full sense of where the recording was made, but they're long enough to engage the listeners.

He further explains that these recordings don't simply take you where they were recorded, but to "a place that's a synthesis of what that place sounded like at a particular moment and your own imagination." If you find yourself with more imagination than money or time, these recordings are the next best thing to a much deserved vacation.▼

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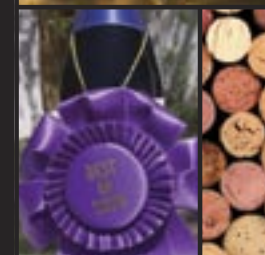
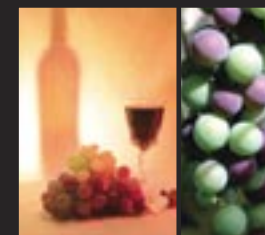
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