

**scottish
ensemble**

Tom Service on Pauline Oliveros

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An Introduction from Tom:

No composer thought more deeply about what it means to listen than Pauline Oliveros. Her band, philosophy, meditative practice and compositional credo, Deep Listening, was discovered in the very specific context of a disused military cistern in Washington State in 1988 - and you can hear what happened in the album she recorded there in the links below! - but Pauline had been deeply listening as a composer, performer, especially as an accordionist, and improviser for decades before then.

[There's a short overview of her life and music in an article I wrote a few years ago in those links too; I'm looking forward to delving deeper with you all when we meet!](#)

Pauline - who died at the age of 84 in 2016 - describes her philosophy of Deep Listening herself in the short talk in the first link in the list overleaf, but this account of what it means in practice, and the gently but powerfully and subversively life-changing potential of deep listening for all of our lives, musical and otherwise, shows what it's all about - and why it's something we can all do:

"I sit quietly with my alarm clock, close my eyes and open my ears. At that point the curtain rises and the performance begins. My very surroundings seem to come alive, each sound revealing the personality of its creator. There are several sounds, which become fixed in my ear like some "basso ostinato": the continuous whirrings of factory machinery in the distance and the hollow sound of plopping water in a nearby fountain. This background of course is interrupted by the piercing motif of a bird. A sudden breath of air sweeps across the deck. The pages of my book respond with quick snapping sound. The door at the entrance squeaks and moans on the same pitch like an old rocking chair then closes with a thud. I can hear the drapery from an opened window rustling against the coarse plastered walls, while the drawing cord syncopates against the window pane..."

Pauline Oliveros, 1967

During the lockdown, Scottish Ensemble's musicians remotely made a recording of one of Pauline's [Sonic Meditations](#) - due to be released online at the end of July. As we listen to Pauline's works, and consider the scores of the *Sonic Meditations*, we can ask ourselves questions like the following...

Questions to Consider while Listening:

- If there's such a thing as "deep" listening, what's "shallow" listening? Do you agree with Pauline (in the 10-minute talk below) that "hearing" isn't the same thing?
- What's our role as listeners? For Pauline Oliveros, it's clear that to listen is as important - more important, in fact - than to "perform" or even to "compose": what are our responsibilities as listeners, to each other, to the world, to the musicians we're hearing?
- What are we creating when we listen deeply?
- What's the sound of listening? Not as paradoxical as it seems - perhaps...
- Do you think Deep Listening has implications beyond Oliveros's music and practice?
- Try one of the [Sonic Meditations](#) - any of them you like; there's a good one, listed as number XVIII: "Listen to a sound until you no longer recognize it". What do you experience?
- How can we all listen more deeply as a culture - to music, and to each other?

Listening Links:

- [Pauline Oliveros on hearing and listening, speaking](#) in 2015: - *if nothing else, watch this before the session!*
- [Oliveros's Bye-Bye Butterfly](#)
- [Deep Listening - the 1989 album](#)
- [The Ready Made Boomerang](#) (1991) - The Deep Listening Band
- [David Tudor performs John Cage's 4'33", with Cage's introduction](#)
- [Jez riley French: island fjórar](#)
- [John Luther Adams: Become Ocean](#)
- [The world's longest man-made echo](#): it's not in Washington State - it's at Invergordon...
- [The Scores for Oliveros's Sonic Meditations](#)
- [Tom's piece on Pauline's life and work](#)