

## Soundscape Music: Sub-genre of New-age Music

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*Abstract:* Since the concept of Soundscape brought forth by Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer in the 1960s, researchers and musicians in different realms started to study the new term. In most instances, researchers prefer to pay attention to Soundscape effects on noise control, but nowadays, some issues related to Soundscape begin to focus on the Soundscape expression in music which enlarges the Soundscape extensional meaning. In music realm, Soundscape researchers investigate its musical expression methods and the intersection between Soundscape expression type and the others. In the International Computer Music Conference2009, there was an article strived to discuss the methods of classification of the electroacoustic soundscape. Then based on the works, we consider that whether or not soundscape should be a musical genre, and if we got a positive answer, which attribution should it equipped with?

*Key-Words:* Soundscape New-age music Sub-genre Musicality Good-quality Sensitivity

### 1 Introduction

Nowadays, soundscape is used in different areas. Generally speaking, the application can be divided into noise standard which is uniform and composition which is full of musicality. On the base of soundscape features and purposes used in composition, we present soundscape music concept. Thereby, we are wondering that if there should be a clear feature of soundscape to differentiate some other close music genres. To make soundscape music easy to be recognized, I mean, not only in the soundscape recordings, but in the soundscape music concept, we need to classify unique features to distinguish soundscape music from other music genres. We notice that soundscape and some other quasi genres like new-age music have a lot of things in common. Then, how is about the link between the two genres? The relationship type is inclusive or parallel? Is it necessary to sum soundscape music features to differentiate it from the other genres? The questions should be answered by our study..

soundscape with three main elements: keynote sounds, sound signals and soundmark. In the three main elements, the soundmark plays the most important role which Schafer wrote in the book “The Turning of the World”, which says “once a soundmark has been identified, it deserves to be protected, for soundmarks make the acoustic life of a community unique”.<sup>[2]</sup>

Since the original purpose of soundscape is to make a noise control standard, researchers treat soundscape as a tool to rule the circumstances in different areas since there is a tight relationship between soundscape and noise pollution. But in the last few years, we found there were some issues exploring soundscape in music which should be regarded as a great progress in the development of soundscape.

To show the obvious improvement, we tabulate statistics data about the issues related to soundscape in ICMC2009, and the detailed data is stated in the table1(serial number from [1] to [13],the titles are listed in the reference from [9] to [21]).

### 2 The development of soundscape in music

The term “soundscape” was stated in 1960s by Canadian composer and environmentalist R. Murray Schafer for acoustic ecology<sup>[1]</sup>. He defined

[1]

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R\\_Murray\\_Schafer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R_Murray_Schafer)

[2] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soundscape>

Table 1 Statistical data of Research issues related to Soundscape in ICMC2009<sup>o</sup>

| Different Sessions <sup>o</sup>                             |                                                        |                          |                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Subject <sup>o</sup>                                        | serial number                                          | page number <sup>o</sup> | quantity <sup>o</sup> |
| History/Education <sup>o</sup>                              | [1] [2]                                                | 137 141 <sup>o</sup>     | 2 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Synthesis <sup>o</sup>                                      | [3]                                                    | 155 <sup>o</sup>         | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Education/Synthesis/Sonification <sup>o</sup>               | [4]                                                    | 187 <sup>o</sup>         | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Aesthetics <sup>o</sup>                                     | [5] [6] [7]                                            | 343 351 355 <sup>o</sup> | 3 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Composition Systems                                         | [8]                                                    | 379 <sup>o</sup>         | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Perception <sup>o</sup>                                     | [9]                                                    | 455 <sup>o</sup>         | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Performance System 2 <sup>o</sup>                           | [10]                                                   | 505 <sup>o</sup>         | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Performance <sup>o</sup><br>Systems/Perception <sup>o</sup> | [11] [12] [13]                                         | 541 553 557 <sup>o</sup> | 3 <sup>o</sup>        |
| The Main Author's Nationality <sup>o</sup>                  |                                                        |                          |                       |
| Nationality <sup>o</sup>                                    | serial number <sup>o</sup>                             |                          | quantity <sup>o</sup> |
| Austria <sup>o</sup>                                        | [11] <sup>o</sup>                                      |                          | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Germany <sup>o</sup>                                        | [5] [6] [7] <sup>o</sup>                               |                          | 3 <sup>o</sup>        |
| Mexico                                                      | [9] <sup>o</sup>                                       |                          | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| United Kingdom <sup>o</sup>                                 | [1] [8] <sup>o</sup>                                   |                          | 2 <sup>o</sup>        |
| United States of American                                   | [2] [3] [4] [10] [12] [13] <sup>o</sup>                |                          | 6 <sup>o</sup>        |
| The Class of Establishment of The Main Author <sup>o</sup>  |                                                        |                          |                       |
| Type of the institution <sup>o</sup>                        | serial number <sup>o</sup>                             |                          | quantity <sup>o</sup> |
| Research Institutions <sup>o</sup>                          | [10] <sup>o</sup>                                      |                          | 1 <sup>o</sup>        |
| University <sup>o</sup>                                     | [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [7] [8] [9] [11] [12] <sup>o</sup> |                          | 10 <sup>o</sup>       |
| Others <sup>o</sup>                                         | [6] [13] <sup>o</sup>                                  |                          | 2 <sup>o</sup>        |

### 3 The relationship between soundscape music and new-age music

As we all know, “new age music is peaceful music of various styles, which is intended to create inspiration, relaxation, and positive feelings while listening. Studies have determined that new age music can be an effective component of stress management.<sup>[3]</sup> Some new age music albums come with notes to encourage use in meditation. New age music evolved to include a wide range of styles from electronic space music and acoustic instrumentals using Western instruments to spiritual chanting from other cultures – including Native American flutes and drums, synthesizers, and instrumental world music sounds.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Soundscape concept originally intended to solve the problem of noise, with awareness of public, more and more people treat it as a new mode of music expression, or a new composition tool. Then, soundscape is divided into hi-fi as used in expression,

and low-fi used in noise standard. The most evident feature of hi-fi soundscape is full of musicality. “From an ecological standpoint, the hi-fi soundscape is populated by many individual 'species' which are the result of local conditions. They are information rich, and most importantly, are most richly interpreted by locals who understand their contextual meanings.”<sup>[5]</sup> While, “almost everything about technology promotes standardization and uniformity, right from the micro level of hums and broad-band noise, through to the influences that produce 'lo-fi' soundscapes in every urban centre, as well as their surroundings (Schafer 1977, 1993).”<sup>[6]</sup> Therefore, we suppose to make a definition of so-called “hi-fi” soundscape. Considering the attribute of hi-fi soundscape and the general soundscape concept, we put forward a soundscape music definition instead of hi-fi soundscape as a genre which full of musicality utilizing sound materials to express local eco-environment and culture environment as a representation or a tool in music category.

New-age music has much in common with soundscape music. One significant kind of new-age music is similar with soundscape music which utilizes nature sound or electro sound as materials to compose too. Further, both of them don't have core lyrics, and even the purposes of the two genres (I mean new-age music genre and soundscape music genre) have a lot in common: new-age music aims at relieving human pressure——“the intention is to consciously create a soundtrack that resonates at a higher frequency and serves at a higher level of bringing harmony and peace to body, mind, spirit.” However, soundscape music tends to improve human sensitivity to sound, reinforcing their reorganization to ambient sound. Therefore, the goal of soundscape music and new-age music, striving to refresh human mind and body into their natural condition by using music adjusting human physiological psychology under the background of feeling tired build on the same final purpose. For instance, the album “moonlight festival” delivered a night-soundscape in Taiwan to us. (See figure 1) In the song “moonlight festival”, producer chose crocking of frog and cello as music components, intertwining and antistrophic, making us enjoy the serene Taiwan night and sweet atmosphere.

[3] Lehrer, Paul M.; David H. (FRW) Barlow, Robert L. Woolfolk, Wesley E. Sime (2007). *Principles and Practice of stress management, Third Edition.* New York: Guilford Press pp. 46-47. ISBN 159385000X.

[4] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age)

[5] <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/OS7.html>

[6] <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/OS7.html>



Fig. 1 the cover of album “moonlight festival”<sup>[7]</sup>  
 Of course, there are some differences between the two. Comparatively speaking, soundscape music expresses lifeway that sound conveys while new-age music works equipped with more obvious musicality. Setting the matter of soundscape used in noise standard aside, just considering pure soundscape music, I reckon that soundscape music prefer uniqueness to generality. R. Murray Schafer (1969, 1977) pointed the soundscape concept as the 'universal' composition of which we are all composers.<sup>[8]</sup> Obviously, soundscape music provides cultural meanings from different angles of view, because everybody observes the chosen objective in their own opinions, while new-age music, in most cases, appears to be more general due to the fact that there is no limitation for new-age music materials' utilization, from nature sound to jazz elements, etc, everything can be used in mixing new-age music. Prefer pursuing uniform function or purpose, not the same in technology, is new-age music's highlight lying in its essence. The music type should be classified to new-age music category as long as its function and purpose meet new-age music's feature, in spite of differences in a thousand and one ways in composition technology and performance skills. Aiming at increasing human sensitivity to acoustic sound, the ultimate end of soundscape music is to recover human natural condition. Then, in my opinion, soundscape music is a sub-genre of new-age music.

<sup>[7]</sup> <http://t.douban.com/pic/s2622490.jpg>

<sup>[8]</sup> <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/OS7.html>

#### 4 soundscapes in different areas demonstrate different features

With more and more record companies and individuals interesting in soundscape recording, we need judgment criteria to tell the difference between the satisfying one and the disappointing one. The soundscape concept at beginning refers to the music in environment, aiming at enhancing people's acoustic sensitivity. Then we consider that the purpose not only contains increasing acoustic sound sensitivity, but also rouse people's discrimination related to various soundscape with different characteristics. Leaving “low-fi” soundscape that used in making noise standard aside, based on the utilization of soundscape components, we separate soundscape music into two parts: using soundscape material as a tool in composition, and just record the pure natural sound completely (I put human's voice in the sound environment into the later one). (See figure 2) So, no matter the on-the-spot soundscape music records or the mixing using the soundscape materials, the good records should including clear sound details at least you can identify every factor and component, and the local individual soundscape characteristics.

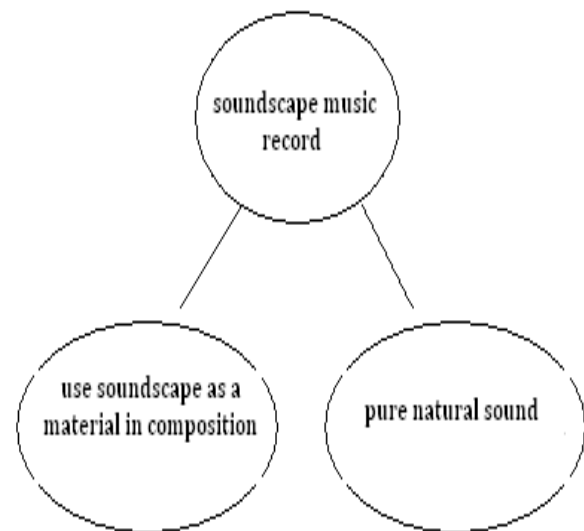


Fig. 2 two types of soundscape record

The good-quality soundscape music record should describe every sound detail by careful processing. The record must express the subtle gradation, because the acoustic sound shows variation with time going by, including the total system varying and

slight or huge dynamic change in every part. So, to strengthen audiences' acoustic sensitivity based on hearing experience, there are two essential points to do:

Firstly, the recording must keep high fidelity as well as possible so as to the audiences could rebuild the soundscape recording environment while listening to the recording. If the reproduced soundscape environment is quite other than the real recording environment, the work is not worth being called "good-quality". For instance, the audiences image the acoustic sound source as a huge one, while the truth is not, then the work should be put down as a failure. Therefore, the recorder should choose the right pick-up method, and use appropriate microphones according to different materials or parts when it comes to recording the soundscape. After that, the recorder still can't ease off, because in the processing of editing, he must be very careful and use the pan-shift reasonably at least not to destroy the original soundscape recording environment.

Secondly, the works should show recording environment variations as far as they can. For this reason, recording should be optimized in dynamic and EQ adaption. The more details conveyed, the better the work is.

A good soundscape music record should present the local soundscape character. Not to demand the producer to choose the most representative soundscape, but to let audiences reproduce environment that the soundscape recordings want to express at least with typical soundscape or just some general nature sound materials. The recorder should try their best to achieve the goal that "outline the character of the people living there" (Schafer).<sup>1</sup>

No matter how to handle the after-treatment, to produce an excellent soundscape music record, do remember that the most extreme feature of soundscape music is musicality. The record should provide the audiences a "melodious" soundscape which express the local eco-environment and culture environment.

## 5 Conclusion

Considering the different soundscape features based on different purposes, we divide soundscape into hi-fi as soundscape music and low-fi as noise standard. With music expressions tending to be more and more diversified, we are wondering that we should make a definition of soundscape music, which should be classified as a sub-genre of new-age music by comparison. To state soundscape music features

and functions, we discuss the definition as a genre which full of musicality utilizing acoustic sound to express local eco-environment and culture environment as a representation or a tool in music category. And no matter how to use the recording technology, the foremost important principle is keeping soundscape's musicality.

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