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THE MISSING LINK

Annea Lockwood

The New Zealand composer has forded rivers, destroyed pianos and detected pulsars in order to listen to the world. On a new release she turns attention to her life with Ruth Anderson

By Louise Gray

Photography by Devin Doyle

There are two ways into Annea Lockwood and Ruth Anderson's *Tête-À-Tête*, the album that Lockwood released after the death, in November 2019, of Anderson, her spouse for nearly 50 years. The first is obviously through the music. The album's two central electroacoustic pieces – Anderson's *Conversations* (1974) and Lockwood's reply, *For Ruth* (2021) – are arrestingly intimate compositions that shimmer with emotional energy and human connection. The second way is through vision rather than sound. Looking past the two main images on the album's sleeve – Lockwood and Anderson, head to head, laughing without restraint – there are more than 20 small photos. This tiny album is a record of a creative community, but it also offers momentary glimpses into a shared life, creative and otherwise.

This return home represents a significant new charge in Lockwood's work. After what one might term macro composition – works made for installations, ensembles, soloists, that address landscapes, waterways, big themes of the listening subject in a galaxy of sounds – it's tempting to think of *Tête-À-Tête* as a micro composition, a sonic rendering of a relationship, of an encompassing history of two people. But the notion that one might divide half a century and more of work in this way is a false one. Lockwood's music has always been about sound, its shapes, its internal complexities, how it affects us, and how we listen. Sometimes this sound is rendered by means of conventional instruments or electroacoustic methods, sometimes through installations.

As a composer, Lockwood's rigorous approach to her material links her across many genres: from musique concrète to time-based performance art to experimental music and experiential sound. Given her way of framing her work to draw attention to what is happening within its boundaries, she's closer to John Cage than first glances suggest, while the emphasis on sonic materiality has an affinity with Éliane Radigue. And like Pauline Oliveros, she realises the value of socially engaged listening.

Her way of placing human-made sounds with those of the natural world began in earnest with *Tiger Balm* (1970) and *World Rhythms* (1975); the practice underlines the deep connection between the spheres of operation that Lockwood wants to accentuate. It's exciting listening, for example, to the skittering water bugs in *Inside The Watershed* (2022), an installation made with the composer Liz Phillips and situated on a riverbank

in Philadelphia; it's altogether less exciting to think of the decline of insect populations – something that Lockwood's *Into The Vanishing Point* (2019) explicitly addresses. Increasingly, as environmental disaster beckons, her composition makes for urgent listening.

Together, me in London and Lockwood in New York, we are peering at our copies of *Tête-À-Tête* over a Skype video call. One photo shows Anderson seated next to a bearded man. "So, that's the composer Warren Burt, who's been in Australia for many years," reveals Lockwood from the home she shared with Anderson for nearly 50 years. "He's a brilliant guy who works a lot with computer systems... Warren is introducing her to the Timex-Sinclair program. She loved it, and away she went and made *Resolutions* [1974]." Other photographs show domestic scenes in New York, New Hampshire or Montana, Anderson's home state, where the couple bought a plot of land by Flathead Lake and constructed a house for themselves.

There's also a shot of the poet May Swenson, whose poem *The Pregnant Dream* Anderson had set to overlapping tape voices in 1968 with her partner, the writer Rozanne 'Zan' Knudson. It was finally released on *Here* through Arc Light Editions. One tiny photo has special significance. "That's me, Ruth, [composer] Lin Barron and [her then partner] Pauline Oliveros," Lockwood says. "We'd invited Lin and Pauline to come have Christmas with us, as I recall, in Hancock, New Hampshire, possibly at the end of our first year together in 1973. We had a riotous time."

Oliveros provided the conditions for Lockwood and Anderson to meet in the first place. Knowing Lockwood was keen to move to the US from London, she suggested to Anderson that the New Zealander might provide sabbatical cover for Anderson's classes in the electronic music studios of Hunter College at the City University of New York. Lockwood came to New York for a semester and stayed a lifetime. Within 72 hours of her arrival, Lockwood was, she writes, "joyously entangled" with Anderson. Lockwood was then 34 years old, Anderson, 45.



Annea Lockwood in New York, June 2023

A cluster of other photos shows details of tape machines, mics, yards of tape dangling around a room. "These are precious to me," says Lockwood. "They're images of the electronic studio that Ruth set up in Hancock while she was on sabbatical. We're splicing tape together." The last picture we look at offers a view from the windows of this Hancock cottage, something hanging outside. "It's a little shell mobile from the Philippines, I think, which we still have, I still have," Lockwood replies.

It might seem a small issue of semantics – Lockwood's split-second changing of the plural we to a single I – but it's central to *Tête-À-Tête*. *For Ruth* is also with Ruth. This album evidences a shared creative life, a relationship that still refuses to occupy the past tense. Anderson's *Conversations* (1974) and Lockwood's *For Ruth* (2021) provide the two pillars of *Tête-À-Tête*. This pair of compositions bookmark a span of history, the beginning and (a kind of) end of a relationship. Both works are entwined in their use of the same basic material: recordings made by Anderson from their telephone conversations in the very early days of their relationship. "She did tell me at some point that she was making these recordings," says Lockwood. It was soon after they met, and they were falling in love.

The intimacy of the sonic material is astounding, sitting between composition, sound poetry and musique concrète. There is much laughter in them. On *Conversations*, Anderson has spliced in bits sliced from popular tunes, "Oh, oh, oh, you beautiful doll!", "Yes, sir, that's my baby!", alongside words spoken by her and Lockwood, "And I got a letter from you, yes I did"; "Mmm, maybe". It's not always easy to tell who's saying what, but it doesn't matter. For the later composition, Lockwood revisited Hancock and recorded birdsong by their old cottage, adding a sound of memory and place that exists outside the semantics of language.

Anderson's *Conversations* was a private gift, a concrète love letter, to Lockwood, whose subsequent relistenings to the piece made her realise that the conversation was not over. "I had to make *For Ruth*," she declares. "It was an absolute compulsion. I sometimes think it was my way of talking to her still."

She's quietly pleased that Luxembourg's Festival Rainy Days plans to situate *For Ruth* as a stereo sound installation in November, where listeners will overhear the 'conversation' through hidden speakers.

The sound, the music, the photographs of *Tête-À-Tête* all speak of a profound connectedness that suffuses all of Lockwood's work. Giving people their due is something she does continually: to her tutor at London's Royal College of Music, Peter Racine Fricker, who pointed the young Lockwood towards the electroacoustic sounds of Darmstadt and associated studios; the composer Gottfried Michael Koenig, her tutor in all things musique concrète, who opened her ears to the internal structure of a sound. When I ask Lockwood how she changed from a young and curious composer arriving in London in 1961, after first studying in her native New Zealand, to an artist steeped in the avant garde at the end of the decade, she says simply: "Darmstadt is what happened to me... Koenig got me to concentrate on how parameters can be shaped in a piece and how they interact to create structures and meaning. And on the other hand, he was teaching me how to work with studio electronics, which was a whole new field to me then."

Much of our conversation revolves around relationships, not only in terms of human relations but, ever more urgently, the relationship between humanity and its environment. In a 2004 interview conducted by the musician and academic Tara Rodgers (included in the 2010 book *Pink Noises*), Lockwood spoke of how often female-authored work falls into "the black hole of no info", precisely because female artists tend to work in ways and means that are less easy to represent or document. Lockwood addressed this issue in collaboration with Fluxus artist Alison Knowles in *Womens Work* (1975–78), their compilations of text and image scores from artists including Mary Lucier, Mieko Shiomi and Oliveros. In this sense, the juxtapositioning of Anderson and Lockwood's work in *Tête-À-Tête* might be understood as a gesture of feminist justice: of literally ensuring that another person is heard.



Annea Lockwood & Liz Phillip, *Inside The Watershed* (2022), Pennsylvania, US

In our conversation Lockwood continues the point that artists work in collaboration, paying homage to instrument-maker Hugh Davies; composer and sound engineer Maggi Payne, who performed restoration and tape transfer work on Anderson's *Resolutions* and *Conversations*; Hildegard Westerkamp, the composer whose deep involvement with sound and ecology mirrors Lockwood's own preoccupations. Éliane Radigue, whom she first met while the French composer was spending time in the US in the early 1970s, is another close friend, joined in their sense of a universal vibration of sound. Lockwood cites sound poets Bob Cobbing and Charles Amirkhania, and composer and technologist Bob Bielecki with fondness. Like Oliveros, they are "big enablers", who, in their interlocking communities of artists, engaged rather than competed with one another.

In Sam Green's beguiling documentary *Annea Lockwood: A Film About Listening* (2021), Lockwood speaks about "listening to the sounds of the world". We see shots of her in headphones listening to the beetles on the water, to the winds, to the grasses on the riverbank. In effect the film is a guided meditation on listening, capturing something of the stillness that a listener needs to retune their ears. Attentive listening is key to Lockwood's composition. Not because it's music, but because, following John Cage, anything has the potential to be music. She says, "I had come to the feeling that individual sounds, sound events, have an internal complexity in relation to their frequencies and the rhythms."

Darmstadt taught her to look inside the harmonic interior of a sound, and in her *Glass Concerts*, types of glass were brought in gentle contact with each other to produce rhythms and harmonic textures. Referencing in particular the industrial or micro-glass used for these concerts, Lockwood says, "Glass has this interior complexity with which those frequencies emerge and disappear which is truly beautiful. In Germany, I was trying to create complexes of sounds from the oscillators and ring modulators and filters and whatnots. They fascinated me, but there was a moment when it struck me that everything I created was not

alive. I think at that point the concept of sound as alive or not, came into my work.

"The next stage was to go direct to the sounds themselves and present them as little individual pieces of music," she continues. "Why should we not attune our ears so finely that we can hear them as pieces of music without stringing them together into contrapuntal relationships and harmonic relationships, thereby obscuring their interior complexity? Let's reveal it instead."

As she deconstructed her own compositional techniques, there was perhaps a certain inevitability that the deconstruction of the actual instrument would follow, with her *Piano Transplants* series. Her first *Piano Burning* was on London's Chelsea Embankment at a small festival called Pavilions In The Park in 1968, where she used two defunct pianos from a dump in Wandsworth. Other actions followed, including planting pianos in gardens or drowning them. These works were compositions predicated on decomposition; they were about a transfer of energy rather than destruction. Also, they were not without humour: *Piano Burning* comes with careful instructions: "Spill a little lighter fluid on a twist of paper and place inside, near the pedals. Light it. Balloons may be stapled to the piano. Play whatever pleases you for as long as you can."

The spirit of these works reflected their rich contact with the world opened by the 60s counterculture. "We were hanging out in a very wide group of experimental artists in London which incorporated Charlotte Moorman, Nam June Paik and Carolee Schneemann," recalls Lockwood. "I met Charlotte because she needed a gofer. She and Nam June were doing a show at the ICA, I think it was. She invited me over to the Avant Garde Festivals in New York for a while, which were great fun. At [the seventh festival in 1969], I remember hanging about 15 panes of mirrored glass on trees on an uninhabited island in the middle of the Hudson so they would catch sunlight and just glitter – and without even thinking about how that could disrupt the Coast Guard's data collections.

"Another of them taught me something interesting. I had just started doing the *River Archive*, when I was asking people to send me tapes of rivers but hadn't started recording myself. I was putting river sounds on cassettes and just simply walked through the festival with pairs of headsets, popping them onto people's heads. They would feed back to me that the rivers were passing from left to right. They weren't panning at all: they were mono recordings, but everybody experienced them as directional flow, because of the associations of river water. I found that totally fascinating."

I tell her that Soft Machine's Kevin Ayers and members of Pink Floyd were bowled over by the *Glass Concerts*, the first one being held at Middle Earth, and she's rather pleased. "Oh, I loved The Pink Floyd! Every now and then, I'd go to one of their performances and sort of bathe in the experience. I loved their sound and those morphing shapes and blobs they were using."

Lockwood played Indian bells, Tibetan gong and various toys on a 1969 album entitled *War Between Fats And Thins* in Harvey Matusow's Jews Harp Band. Lockwood's then-husband Matusow was a complicated figure who, among many things, was a producer and musician. "Harvey had an Austrian Jew's harp, which we prized for its lovely sound. It occurred to him to make up a band of Jew's harp players. We put an ad in *International Times*, and we recruited Lesley Kenton, a fine singer who was the daughter of Stan Kenton, and an elderly man then in his sixties, who had been playing the Jew's harp professionally for years. It wasn't a deliberate absurdity. We really did love the sounds."

When Matusow conceived of the International Carnival of Experimental Sound in August 1972, Lockwood was in the thick of it. She has mixed memories of the chaos. "ICES is a really difficult thing for me to think about," she says. "It was a simultaneously amazing experience, you know, exposure to Takehisa Kosugi and Taj Mahal Travellers doing beautiful improv all night, seeing Carolee roller-skate up and down a carriage on the London-Edinburgh train, my first exposure to work pieces based on biofeedback.

"However, we didn't raise enough money and we couldn't keep promises to artists that we would be able to cover their

travel expenses, put them all up, or were only able to do it partially. I still feel bad about it, and this has coloured my feelings about ICES." (A detailed feature about the event can be found in *The Wire* 336).

More sonic contact with the natural world followed with *Tiger Balm* (1970), a tape work that elides erotic breathing with feline purrs and other noises, and *World Rhythms* (1975), for time-marking gong and ten channels of environmental sounds, from pulsars and earthquakes to human breathing. "My really strongly held feeling is that sound conveys so much to us of the actual energies and materials, through which our whole environment springs," Lockwood says. "It's wonderful that sound does not have to be tied up with semantics to convey meaning; its meanings seem to me go deeper than words often do."

In the insistence of the importance of listening, Lockwood is akin to Oliveros and Radigue. For all three composers, listening is a skill, a practice, a process that requires a critical awareness that can occupy many modalities. Oliveros framed this within her practice of Deep Listening, a non-hegemonic listening to all things at all times. Radigue, with her acute awareness of the resonances of the room and the consequential interactions of sound, understands listening as an expansive activity that recognises that human-heard sound is but a minuscule part of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Even if Lockwood sometimes twists into the human auditory range the impossible sounds of pulsars, bats and the like, she is more earthbound than Oliveros or Radigue. For many years, Lockwood's compositions have been alert to the fact that we have but one world and we need to care for it. Listening in this sense is about care and nurturing, about hearing a balance, rather like a formal exercise in counterpoint, of what's happening.

This alarm for the natural world is sounded loudest in Lockwood's *Into The Vanishing Point* (2019), a collaborative work with piano/percussion quartet Yarn/Wire, which takes as its starting point the devastation of global insect populations. The *River Archive* in particular – the *Sound Maps* of the Hudson, the Danube, the Housatonic – speaks to us of deep history: the Danube will be here long after we've all gone. There is something awesome in listening to this sounding structure and realising that we are, in effect, listening to deep time. Their sounds are not brought within any constraining logic of music but left to themselves.

Sound and music, Lockwood makes clear, are not mutually exclusive. "It's all and always has been all one," she asserts. "Ever since I started working with glass, sound and music have been inseparable really. My feeling is that putting that together, our access to the energies and materiality of everything in our environment through the sounds accentuates the fact that everything is vibrational. It's something that Radigue's music points out, and as all old traditions continually point out, that everything is vibrational. It follows that the phenomena around us are emitting vibrations, which move through our bodies and affect us. We live with them, whether it's some sort of diffused vibration, coming across from [the volcano] Mount Kilauea at the moment it reactivates, or something much closer to home.

"We live with these vibrations," she continues. "If we can let ourselves hear, if we can pull them into the conscious aspect of our senses, by translating them into our hearing range, then we're making a form of conscious connection, both conscious and unconscious, through our bodies, with that phenomenon. If we connect to it on this direct personal physical level, then how can we continue to feel separate from it?"

Her music suggests that we must listen and act and, in the quietest and most subtle ways, work with one another. Often this can be done with a light touch. There is a clear delight written into *Wild Energy*, for example, which has a hammock for visitors to relax and listen in at Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts in Katonah, New York. The recent project *Inside The Watershed* with Liz Phillips on the Schuylkill River Trail in Pennsylvania is a small wooden arbour set with two benches, the backs of which have transducers attached to them. "You sit back, lean against the back, your body vibrates with the low frequencies," explains Lockwood. "In the arbour's ceiling are a couple of speakers

which relay hydrophone recordings made right at the spot you're looking at. Liz hooked an accelerometer up to the roof, which picks up wind speed and direction and feeds that as a controller down to the set-up that's replaying the underwater recording. It shifts with the wind shift and so on, which is nice. You're looking at the water, which has this wonderful mobile but impenetrable surface, but your ears are penetrating under it to the vibrant world of critters."

Increasingly, Lockwood has explored collaborative work, from relatively formal beginnings in which a score is made for someone else (for example, *Heat* for choreographer Richard Alston in 1968, and the 2007 six-channel work *Jitterbug*, commissioned by Merce Cunningham Dance Company) to explorations made closely with another performer. One such is *Becoming Air*, the product of an ongoing close relationship with the extended trumpeter, Nate Wooley. "One aspect of collaborating which I really relish is that it loosens my control," says Lockwood, "This tends to produce sound events which I could never have thought up by myself. Nate's been experimenting with holding a sheet of metal to the bell of his trumpet for a long time, but every time he does it, it surprises him. And in *Becoming Air*, it surprises me too.

"But to zip back to early times, that element of surprise is something I learned from the *Glass Concerts*, where I would set pieces of glass in motion. Of the spectrum of sounds that emerged, some were totally anticipated, but very often, as the vibrational energy intensified, the glass would take me by surprise and produce sounds I could never have thought of."

Lockwood's most recent work continues to source sounds in unusual places – such as the peace walls that separate some Catholic and Protestant communities in Belfast, for Maria Fusco and Margaret Salmon's opera film *History Of The Present*. The way her peace wall phrases pick up surface fragility is poignant, its resonating waves of low sounds suggesting a foundational unease, of ground shifting this way and that.

It's in keeping with her methodology, however. Her *Sound Maps*, installations of sounds gathered from numerous points along the course of the Hudson, the Danube and other rivers are obvious examples – along with the human lives that skitter along their surfaces. In the case of each river, she asked questions of the people who live along them. "I was simultaneously wanting to find a way to record a river with as much of its presence as possible, so that a listener can be drawn into the sound and feel no separation between the sound as an object coming through the speakers to which she is listening, and herself. And corollary to that, I'm curious about why we are so drawn towards the sound of water... why does water sound entice us so much so that we'd love to live near rivers and walk them and hang out by rivers?"

The central question she asked herself was: what is a river? The water recordings, made with stereo mics and hydrophones, and their subsequent installations, alongside brief interviews with people alongside the rivers, produced layered answers. Sometimes these touched on ownership, especially in terms of indigenous people (elsewhere, Lockwood has spoken admiringly of First Nation peoples in New Zealand who, by making a local river a legal entity, have given it personhood and thereby legal protection). Then there were the human lives – strings of them across millennia, all finite – bound up in the river.

"For the Hudson, I wanted to convey to listeners a sense of the physicality of the river, because it's such a beautiful visual entity, especially for New Yorkers," she says. "But how can it speak to you? That immediately brings up its physical nature, how powerful the river's currents are, and how deceptively calm it very often looks. To get to that aspect of the forcefulness of rivers, I spoke to people who work on the river or live next to it, asking them to talk about experiences they've had on their bodies of the river's power. So those interviews have focused on that, making the physical connection with the river come into focus. The Danube, I recorded in part because I felt I hadn't got close enough to the Hudson in my field recordings. This question again: what is a river? It is a living thing."

The living present and its historical undercurrents are part of the soundtrack for *History Of The Present*, with vocal

improvisations by the soprano Héloïse Werner. Drawing on the legacy of The Troubles, the brutal conflicts in Northern Ireland between republican and unionist factions in the province, *History Of The Present* premiered earlier this year on the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement which brought the chapter to a close. Lockwood's soundtrack is made from interacting with Belfast's peace walls, defensive structures that still separate communities. "They're still there, even although they were supposed to be dismantled after the Good Friday Agreement," she says. "They're huge overlaid sheets of corrugated iron, anchored in brick and cement, the least resonant-looking objects you could imagine."

Because Lockwood couldn't visit Belfast to make her recordings until October 2022, Fusco, who grew up besides one of the peace walls, introduced her to Pedro Rebelo, who runs the Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's University Belfast, and one of his doctoral students Georgios Varoutsos. "Pedro and Georgios recorded the walls for me using Geofóns [seismic mics]. They picked up low waves, like passing traffic, which turned out to be very useful. They do sound like waves to me. Once I got to Belfast, I wanted to experience some walls and I wanted to experience Belfast very directly. I hooked up with Pedro and Georgios, and we took a great field recording set-up out to the walls: two Geofóns, an ambisonic and a parabolic mic, which was wonderful because I had several different versions of that sound to play with. I could choose whichever version meant most to me at the time.

"We were teaching ourselves how to play the walls," she continues, "pulling stones down the groove of the walls, gently touching flakes of paint. On a slightly rainy day, Pedro picked up a leaf and started moving the stem of the leaf across the walls laterally, which produced this beautiful high frequency glissando. Once back in New York, I started piecing together what I call phrases, anything from 40 seconds to about eight minutes, and sent them off to Maria and Margaret to choose from."

At a sonic and ideational level, Lockwood's composition – and the thought that underpins it – is about connection, and the ecologies or networks of connection. Her *Sound Maps* are as much the flowing polyrhythms of flowing water as an acknowledgement that these waters irrigate human history and lives. The listener is not separate from the sound.

Accordingly, imbalances in the soundscape, the ecosphere, are things we should attend to. Our conversation shifts towards the weather, the air, the forest fires blazing across Canada as we talk. "Oh, it's bad," Lockwood declares. "I dropped Hildegard [in Canada] an email saying, are you OK? And she is." The air in New York is bad, too, I say. "It cleared out after two days. We wear N95 masks when we must. But something switched in my mind about this. The first of the two days, smoke was just pouring over the city. The sky was a mixture of ochre, grey and monochrome. Forget about what it smelled like..." She pauses. "It made me suddenly realise that when I need solace, I go outside and I look at the sky, the clouds, the trees, all of it flourishing, this deep space you can just float up into. If what we're doing means that space is suddenly like this, impenetrable, then where do we turn to for solace?"

What we've talked about really is the universe of sound and how we occupy it. If you begin to destroy one thing, you start to unsettle everything else. "Yeah," she agrees. "It all unravels. It changes in ways we don't know how to live with yet."

In 2021, Lockwood published a small booklet entitled *Hearing Studies*. It's a collection of 26 exercises/text scores that she and Anderson developed over their teaching careers with the aim of training students and fellow travellers to centre listening on their bodies as both a psychological and physiological experience. One exercise, Lockwood's *Water Meditations* (1973), asks its participant to "Choose a place where the river cascades through falls, a weir, a gorge and the sound approach white noise/ Stay there all day/Let the sounds change you and follow these changes." This, in its own way, is Lockwood's quiet manifesto for ethically driven sonics to create change before it's too late. ○

Annea Lockwood & Ruth Anderson's *Tête-À-Tête* is released by Ergot. Maria Fusco & Margaret Salmon's *History Of The Present* is now touring annealockwood.com

