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Phonography Austin's first 'Annual Report' to showcase the best of local field recordings

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BY [NOAH VAN HOOSER](#)

The act of critically listening to something is often reserved for music, as its engineering, composition and editing seem to invite interpretation. From 7 p.m. to 9 p.m, Phonography Austin will host its first Annual Report tomorrow at Cloud Tree Studio and Gallery to amplify overlooked sounds.

Phonography Austin is a loose collective comprised of local artists who practice field recording, an art form pioneered in the 1970s that captures the importance of immediately surrounding sounds through the recording of environments and research in acoustic ecology.

Saturday's first Annual Report will feature the presentation of the organization's second compilation record, "Volume 02," as well as an improvised collaborative performance between the contributing artists. Among those artists is Travis Putnam Hill, who said that the medium

provides him with a unique escape.

"I kind of fell into the practice by mistake, just using an old tape recorder to compile random sounds, which I would use for sampling in my musical practices," Hill said. "I began viewing it as akin to photography and started practicing it more regularly as a meditative experience."

During the event, each artist will present a seven-minute segment of their choosing, showcasing the sounds they've gathered in the past year. Originating from their backyards to all across the world, the collection of pieces will exemplify the varying scopes of field recording. Artist Alex Keller said the recording process can be understood through a micro and macro context.

"One of the main ways to approach recording would be to focus sharply," Keller said. "This provides a listening experience much more intimate than people are usually capable of. There are others who are more meta in their approach, trying to capture an entire environment."

The Report is part of the organization's initiatives in education and outreach, embodied in their ongoing educational workshops and events, such as World Listening Day. Such projects are oriented around the concept of "acoustic ecology," a practice from the 1960s that focuses on the acoustic environment as a significant societal force.

In an attempt to extend these efforts to the Austin community, the organization has promoted "soundwalks," or instances in which Keller said individuals are taken into natural or urban environments to focus on the surrounding noises.

"Field recordings function to re-sensitize one's self to their environment," Keller said. "We encourage experimentation with these field recordings as finished pieces of art."

Civil engineering freshman Clint Townsend said as a listener of field recordings, the opportunity to give the practice a platform is important for underground art forms.

"Critical attention to non-doctored, organic sounds is neglected," Townsend said. "The best field recordings are pioneering in their experimentation. The more attention that alert, focused listening can receive, the better."

The event is open to the public and the organization will be accepting donations for the group's various equipment purchases. Keller said the event is ultimately an opportunity to deconstruct popular notions of what makes an authentic listening experience.

"The night will be successful if people don't have the expectation of a musical experience," Keller said. "I like the idea that it's possible to have art which is sonic and occurring through time but is not music. There's a potential for

thought-provoking listening outside of just musical endeavor.”



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