
A Call To Action

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"All that is necessary for the forces of evil to prevail in this world, is that enough good men do nothing." - Edmund Burke, 1729-1797

"World Forum for Acoustic Ecology" - The name sounds impressive, but what is it? In truth our organisation is an idealistic glint in the eyes of some people with a predominantly artistic point of view, gathered in Banff, in 1993. At the end of that heady conference, people pledged energy to create a series of regional organisations, federated in a world forum. As is often the case, our conference energy was easily dissipated, as we all became preoccupied with the daily challenge of survival in uncertain times.

The result? In all but a few regions, there is yet to be a proper organisation. The form of the international structure has yet to be defined, and many regional steering committee members are silent, inactive, or plain exhausted from the effort of juggling WFAE activities and their personal lives. Few regions have managed to raise anything resembling operating funds, and there is no real institutional base to our movement.

As I reflect on our efforts to organise the 1996 conference in France - with all our own successes and lapses - the need for that institutional platform screams out at me. If we are to be more than a fringe group hovering in the spaces between art, science, and sociology, we need to concretise in action the ideals laid down at Banff.

None of us can afford the luxury of artistic narcissism.

If we want to protect and defend both our capacities and our opportunities for listening; if we want to improve the quality of sonic life, we must be capable of articulating our ideas and proposing clear and credible actions which have the possibility of real implementation and influence.

This will only be possible with a real structure that has a real treasury and a real (if minimal) professional staff to guide it - perhaps an executive director and an assistant.

It's not enough to note with pleasure how many sound events are organised each year, or to share our sound experiences in this journal, however satisfying these things may be. We need action, energy, and organisation, from YOU! To readers who say, "I'm only interested in the content - I'm not much good at organising" I say, you have no choice. WE have no choice. These are difficult times. The active members of your steering committee are feeling the strain. Some are frustrated, feeling abandoned by the same people who promised so much good will and energy at Banff. If enough of the good men and women who care about sound continue to do nothing, those who do act will grow weary and the WFAE will join the ranks of wondrous ideas generated amid conference enthusiasm, only to be cancelled due to lack of follow-through.

None of us can afford the luxury of artistic narcissism. We are one year away from the

1996 conference in France. Now is the time for each concerned reader of this newsletter to begin the preparation.

A PROGRAMME FOR ACTION

1. If there is no active formal structure in your region, contact your steering committee members and offer to help them create one. Their names and addresses are available from the WFAE office at Simon Fraser University. If they don't or won't act, appoint yourself a steering committee member, and find others who will help you do it.
 2. Start a series of regional meetings now to discuss what sort of organisation you want. How do you define acoustic ecology? What regional and international goals should we establish? What sort of operation is possible, realistic, and desirable in the context of today's economy and the goals you have set?
 3. Start your own organisational and fund-raising efforts if you don't already have them in place.
 4. All regional organisations should reach out to all the many disciplines touching our concerns - let's have the widest community possible in terms of geography, and in terms of disciplines and interests.
 5. Make sure that at least one person from your region attends the 1996 conference as your spokesperson, empowered to speak and act on behalf of your regional membership. It is essential that we leave the conference having fashioned a real international structure with an organisational and business plan, and that the membership perceive that sufficient debate has taken place in a truly representative fashion. The goals we set for ourselves at Banff are modest, and realisable, if we - all of us who care - have the will and the energy to act.
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