



Listening Like Breathing

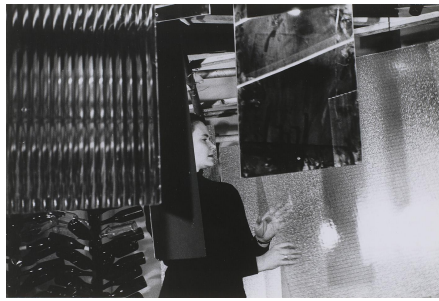
Environmental Immersion in the Work of
Annea Lockwood

by Ron Hanson

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Annea Lockwood, *A Beauty of a Night Burning*, 2004, at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, USA. Photo: Tyler Kidder.



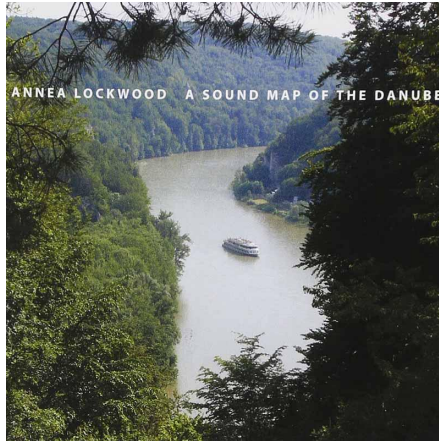
Annea Lockwood, *The Glass Concert*, live audio/visual performance with amplified glass, 1967-70. Image courtesy the artist.



Annea Lockwood in Bulgaria, recording *A Sound Map of the Danube*, 2001-05. Image courtesy of the artist.



Annea Lockwood, *A Sound of the Danube*, installation view, 2005. Image courtesy the artist.



Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *A Sound Map of the Danube*, 2008. Image courtesy the artist.



Annea Lockwood, *Piano Garden*, 1969-70, Ingatestone, Essex, UK. Photo: Chris Ware.

With a career that spans nearly 60 years, New York-based artist Annea Lockwood is a hugely influential figure and reference in the field of art and sound internationally. Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, Lockwood has lived abroad for most of this time but her experimental practice contributes to the international renown of creative work issued from New Zealand; this year, Lockwood received the prestigious SEAMUS award. For this new publication, Taiwan-based New Zealander Ron Hanson, co-founder of the magazine White Fungus, spoke at length with Lockwood to share an insight into her life and career across the globe.

In the mid-to-late 2000s my brother Mark and I were living in Wellington and running our fledgling art magazine *White Fungus*. While we were active in the New Zealand art scene, we were forever expanding our horizons geographically and conceptually. One driving impulse for the project was to go beyond the primacy of the

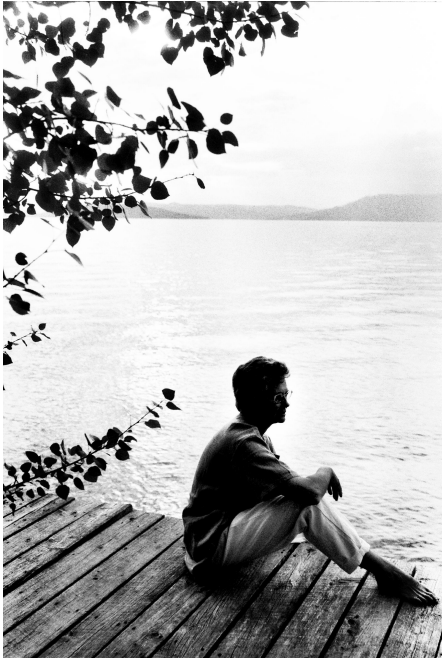
visual in art and culture and fully immerse ourselves in the world of sound. As a medium that can literally penetrate your body and stimulate profound connections to one's environment, sound works were at the centre of our world. Sound is also an area in which New Zealand artists have racked up some considerable achievements, but have struggled to impact on public consciousness. Undeterred by this, we were searching for New Zealand precedents in sound.

It was by way of a circuitous route that we learned about one of New Zealand's most important and consequential artists in any medium, Annea Lockwood. While in Wellington, we had begun mailing copies of *White Fungus* to record labels, galleries and artists around the world in an attempt to break from our isolation. Our mailouts were being reciprocated and had triggered a chain effect. Among the copious piles of amateur poetry found in our post office box, were surprising gems—music albums, letters, and art publications. One day in 2007, a fascinating new music release from New York's Pogus Productions appeared with the title *Thousand Year Dreaming/floating world*. To our surprise, this was by a New Zealand artist, Annea Lockwood.

Lockwood is the most prominent figure in the histories of field recordings, environmental sound installation and composition to have emerged from New Zealand. Her work has been exhibited in museums and performed at festivals all over the world. She has been commissioned by Merce Cunningham Dance Company and featured in *I Am Sitting in a Room: Sound Works by American Artists 1950-2000* as part of the Whitney Museum's American Century survey. In 2020, the artist received the prestigious SEAMUS award, which recognises key contributions to the field of electroacoustic music. Past recipients include Laurie Anderson, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Subotnick, Les Paul and Robert Moog.

But while Lockwood has been claimed for the United States' storied histories of avant-garde composition, the artist's creativity is deeply rooted in her experience growing up in New Zealand. In 2020, I reconnected with Lockwood to learn more about her life story and approach to art. I've long felt that Lockwood should be better known in New Zealand as one of the most unique and impactful artistic talents to have arisen from the country. I hope this piece will lead to more engagement in New Zealand with

Lockwood's work. From my first chance encounter with her music, my curiosity has only grown.



Annea Lockwood. Photo: Nicole Tavenner.



Annea Lockwood. Photo: Ruth Anderson.

Lockwood was born in Christchurch in 1939. Her mother, a composer, got her started on music at an early age. Lockwood began learning the piano at the age of five, and her mother would later teach her to notate the tunes she was concocting. As a teenager, she was encouraged by her piano teacher Gwen Moon and husband Ron Moon to compose music for his string orchestra. Lockwood's father was a lawyer with a deep passion for the outdoors and mountain climbing. He built a one-room hut in the Southern Alps located close to a river. There, Lockwood had her formative childhood experiences of listening intently to the river and to the sounds of kiwi calls, which the artist says were rare even in the 1950s. This, Lockwood reflects, was the ultimate ear training.^[01]

In 1961, after completing a BMus at Lincoln University in Christchurch, Lockwood moved to London to take up a scholarship at the Royal College of Music where she would study composition and piano. At the College, Lockwood's composition professor, Peter Racine Fricker, urged her to attend summer school at Darmstadt in Germany. Darmstadt was at that time the focal point for

electronic music, where the world's hottest minds in the field would converge. Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio and Pierre Boulez were lecturing and John Cage had been there the previous year. There were nightly concerts and lively debates spilling out of the restaurants and pubs. At Darmstadt, Lockwood met the composer Gottfried Michael Koenig and would go on to study under him.

“One moves toward what one is interested in and what can be nutritious” Lockwood told me in our recent conversation. “I was fascinated with serialism. That deep sort of structuralism is not my natural way of thinking, but it was super interesting to be asked to focus on discrete parameters of music and organising them in relation to each other, but in a much more highly structured way than I was used to... It was a big principle of Stockhausen's. I was fascinated by what Boulez was doing, but, in a way, he was too cerebral for me.”

But not everyone was in line with the strict approach of serialism, which Lockwood described in an interview with Daniel Beban for *White Fungus* as “hyper control”.^[02] A key moment of inspiration and counterpoint occurred, she says, when experiencing La Monte Young pushing a chair around a room in a piece he called “Furniture Music”. Young's approach “incorporated happenstance, the way a sound can change in the moment... And it was an exhilarating opposite direction... as if he had managed to switch on a whole new sound source for me and along with it came a whole new conceptual approach, it was just what I needed, what I was most drawn to. I was lucky to have that experience”.^[03]

Lockwood discovered that she was not interested in synthesising sound. Instead, she was drawn to the single untreated sound, in all of its complexity—in the search for “aliveness”. “That was partly a response to total serialist thinking,” she told me, “and partly a response to constructing sounds abstractly in the studio, from ring modulators and oscillators, filters and so on, because, to me, the sounds we could produce never sounded as interesting as sounds that I might hear in a natural environment. They sounded sort of dead, until you put them in a structure, which is what they were designed for.”

Just as visual artists in the 1960s were endlessly expanding the range of materials they would incorporate into their work, the same phenomenon was occurring in the world of sound. Lockwood's breakthrough, as an artist, came in 1966, with her *Glass Concerts*—performances whose aural components consisted entirely of sounds coaxed or provoked from a wide variety of amplified glass objects. Here, the artist's concept of deep focus on the single sound would come to life. Glass, she says, was an underutilised material in music. Metallophones and wood instruments had been endlessly explored, but glass and its aural properties were still unfamiliar.

The Glass Concert would begin in an entirely blacked-out theater, with even the exit lights turned off. Lockwood would stand off-stage manipulating a small piece of glass with an extremely sensitive microphone. "If the source of a sound is unidentifiable, then you're drawn to listening very closely to it."

After 30 minutes, the lighting would come up and visual elements would enter into play. On stage there would be a twelve-by-twelve-foot scaffolding from which various sized panes of glass were hung like a giant mobile. There were bottle trees, the wooden trees vintners would use to hang their bottles on when hanging them out to dry. Lockwood would drop a shower of tiny pieces of micro-glass onto the bottles. There was a corridor of glass tubes of different diameters. The artist would swish the curtain of tubes underneath microphones hanging overhead. Lockwood's then husband, the mercurial Harvey Matusow, would project experimental films onto a backdrop. There were also elements of smashing glass objects such as a car windscreen and television tube. "We came up with the idea of imploding a TV tube," Lockwood says, "which is a heck of a noise and requires all sorts of safety precautions. We had to create a special lined box on stage, as I recall, in which I could smash the thing so it didn't just fly all over the space."

The concerts were a sensation in London and connected to the era's free-flowing interdisciplinary zeitgeist. One concert was attended by Richard Wright of Pink Floyd. Years later he recalled "something interesting, weird and wonderful going [on] — I remember a girl onstage with all of these glass sculptures, lights and films, and whenever the lights went out, she'd break something and make everybody jump."^[04] The BBC interviewed Lockwood on

television, though to this day the artist remains frustrated that they focused only on the practice of smashing glass. Lockwood quickly moved away from the spectacle of shattering glass, saying that, “It may be dramatic, but it’s not interesting.”

Another person who attended one of the London concerts was the South African sound engineer and record producer Michael Steyn, who had started the record label Tangent. Steyn and Lockwood spent two years in a London church recording what would become the artist’s debut album, *Glass World* (1970). Reviewing the record in the *New Statesman*, Michael Nyman wrote that Lockwood had proven that powerful electronic music could be produced with the barest of means. She had demonstrated that a “studio full of elaborate equipment is not necessary” to create “a sound world more astonishing, rare and enchanting than all the *Electric Panorama* [a box set of current electronic sounds released in 1970] composers put together.”^[05]

Lockwood gave more than 70 performances of the *Glass Concert*, touring through Scandinavia, Australia and back home to New Zealand. “I did a week of concerts at Downstage in Wellington and got really mixed responses,” Lockwood says. “There was a lot of skepticism, a lot of ‘what’s so special about this’ type of responses. I think someone wrote a review saying, ‘I could go out my back door and hear those sounds any day’, which, of course, is nonsense. New Zealand birds do not sound like glass.”



Annea Lockwood, *A Beauty of a Night Burning*, 2004, at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, USA. Photo: Tyler Kidder.



Annea Lockwood, *A Beauty of a Night Burning*, 2004, at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, USA. Photo: Tyler Kidder.



Annea Lockwood, *Piano Burning*, 1968, London. Photo: Geoff Adams.



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Annea Lockwood, *Piano Garden*, 1969-70, Ingatestone, Essex, UK. Photo: Chris Ware.

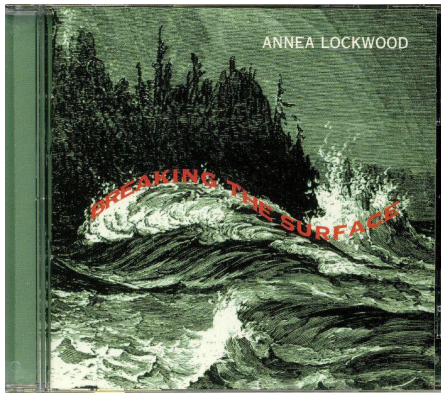
In 1968, Lockwood began a series of what she calls *Piano Transplants*, in which the artist submits defunct grand pianos to the withering and combusive forces of nature. The first *Transplant* was a “piano burning” on London’s Chelsea embankment as part of a poetry festival, *Pavilions in the Park*, organised by the sound poet Bob Cobbing. Subsequent *Transplants* involved drowning, burying and beaching grand pianos. The action, which functions as a kind of ritualistic live happening as well as an anti-compositional sound event, is about relinquishing control, a concept drawn from the philosophy of John Cage. The idea for the initial burning came while working on a never-to-be realised performance piece with the choreographer Richard Alston named *Heat*. The idea was to heat up the performance space to the point where both audience members and performers would be dripping with sweat. The work was to involve the sound of fire. When thinking of how to achieve the sound, Lockwood came upon the idea of recording a burning piano. She was particularly interested in the sounds made when the strings begin to pop. Lockwood described how to perform a piano burning in *White Fungus*:

“If you have an old microphone you can afford to burn up, put it in the base of an upright piano. Piano burning should really be done with an upright piano; the structure is much more beautiful than that of a grand when you watch it burn. The piano must always be one that’s irretrievable, that nobody could work on, that no tuner or rebuilder could possibly bring back. It’s got to be a truly defunct piano.

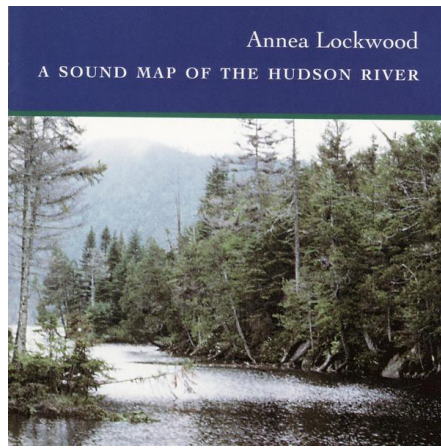
“So place your microphone, run it out to a recording device, and put a little wad of paper soaked in something flammable down in one corner of the piano. Don’t sprinkle lighter fluid or any flammable liquid over the whole piano. *Götterdämmerung* is not what we’re after. Slowly the flames will spread through the whole structure and as they do, they burn away one layer of the structure after another, until finally you get down to the harp and it’s absolutely beautiful to watch. Often I suggest that people over-string the strings, so when they pop they really resonate.

“It can take up to three hours. The flames are the most beautiful colors because of the different varnishes on the instrument, so you get violets and greens as well as reds and oranges. Sometimes I’ve seen smoke just spiraling up from between the keys. And the sounds are terrific. That’s piano burning.”^[06]

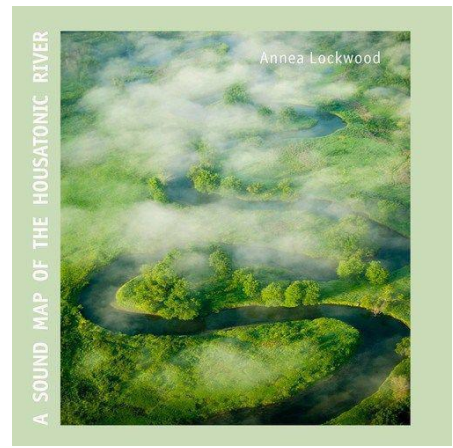
While London had been fertile ground for her artistic development, increasingly Lockwood found herself drawn to New York. She felt a particular affinity with American composers such as Pauline Oliveros, John Cage and the Sonic Arts Union (Robert Ashley, David Behrman, Gordon Mumma, and Alvin Lucier). In 1973, Lockwood had her chance to relocate to New York when Oliveros suggested her to Ruth Anderson as a sabbatical replacement to teach in her studio at Hunter College; Anderson would later become Lockwood’s life partner. The artist has been based in New York state ever since.



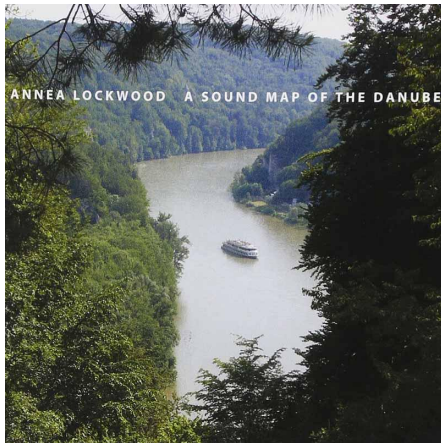
Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *Breaking the Surface: Duende and Delta Run*, 1999. Image courtesy the artist.



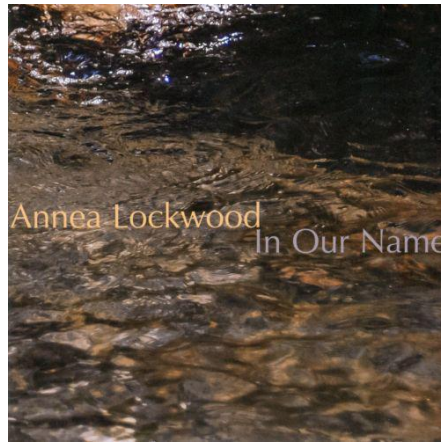
Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *A Sound Map of the Hudson River*, 1989. Image courtesy the artist.



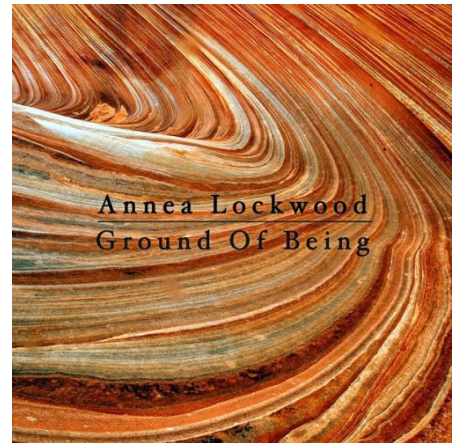
Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *A Sound Map of the Housatonic River*, 2012. Photo: Scott Barrow/Corbis.



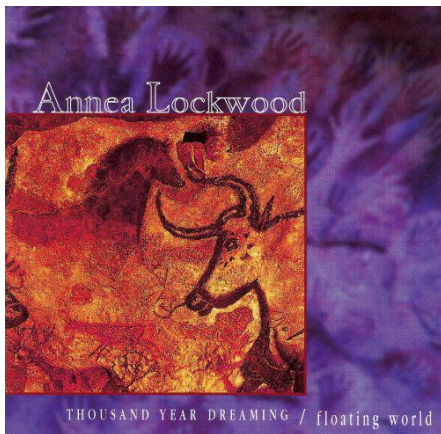
Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *A Sound Map of the Danube*, 2008. Image courtesy the artist.



Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *In Our Name*, 2012. Photo: Richard Friedman.



Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *Ground of Being*, 2014. Photo: Markus Reinkensmeyer.



Album cover of Annea Lockwood's *Thousand Year Dreaming: floating world*, 2007. Image courtesy the artist.

In New York, Lockwood created her famous river installations, a work that began in London in 1966 when she started her *River Archive*: a project with the absurd ambition of collecting the sound

of every river or stream in the world. The recordings led to several installation works. In one presentation at the Kitchen in New York, Lockwood laid out foam pads on the floor so that audience members could lie for hours immersed in the sounds. In an outdoor version of the work in a public square in Hartford, Connecticut, Lockwood placed poly-planar speakers in trees. Casual passersby would suddenly find themselves standing under a waterfall and raise their heads to search for the sources of the sounds.

An odd but fortuitous encounter led to Lockwood's first major river work, *A Sound Map of the Hudson River* (1982). While applying for a job at the Hudson River Museum in New York state, an alert Human Resources staffer told Lockwood that she was an artist, not an administrator, and suggested that she put forward an art proposal instead. Upon walking out of the museum and looking out over the river, inspiration struck. Lockwood determined to record the length of the river. The storied river, she reasoned, was familiar to all New Yorkers in a visual sense, but few had the chance to really hear the river and get a sense of its true power.

Lockwood began hiking down and recording the river in 1981, beginning at its source, Lake Tear of the Clouds, and following it all the way to its opening into the Atlantic Ocean. The recordings resulted in a two-hour installation that was first exhibited at the Hudson River Museum in 1982. The installation includes a map and a clock which allowed audience members to know which part of the river they were listening to at a given moment. At a separate audio station they could listen through headphones to interviews with inhabitants of the river, including fishermen, river pilots, a ranger, and a farmer. In 1989, the recordings were released as an album on Lovely Music. Its release, and the work's environmental concerns, was made all the more poignant when the Exxon Valdez oil spill occurred that same year. *A Sound Map of the Hudson River* is now permanently exhibited at the Hudson River Museum.

After the success of the installation, Lockwood took a 20-year break from river works. She didn't want to become known as the artist who records rivers. But in 2001, she began a new project, perhaps the most ambitious of her artistic career, to record the Danube which runs through 10 European countries, from Germany's Black Forest all the way to the Black Sea. The idea of

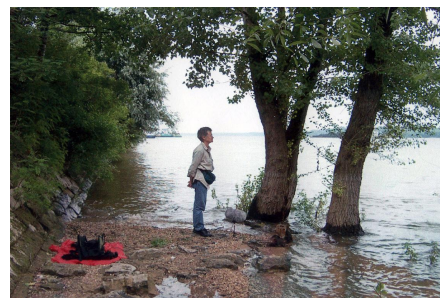
what she was trying to achieve with these river works had crystallised. Lockwood wanted to answer the question: What is a river? What is the nature of a river? The project would require five trips, each longer than five weeks, to traverse the Danube's great expanse and trajectory. On four of the trips she was accompanied by her partner Ruth.



Annea Lockwood in Romania, recording *A Sound Map of the Danube*, 2004. Photo: Ruth Anderson.



Annea Lockwood in Serbia, recording *A Sound Map of the Danube*, 2003. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo: Ruth Anderson.



Annea Lockwood in Bulgaria, recording *A Sound Map of the Danube*, 2004. Photo: Ruth Anderson.



Annea Lockwood, *A Sound of the Danube*, installation view at the Stadthaus, Ulm, Germany 2006. Photo: Sabine Presuhn.



Annea Lockwood, *A Sound of the Danube*, installation view at the Stadthaus, Ulm, Germany 2006. Photo: Sabine Presuhn.

“They were really long trips, moving very slowly,” Lockwood says. In Budapest we would rent old cars, as we felt more comfortable in old Opels which looked a little banged-up because we were getting further into the east with the risk of car theft. So we were going along the fishermen’s rough tracks along the banks. And I would be listening, looking for the likely places where I might find some really good sound. We would stop driving, Ruth would sit in the car or on the bank of the river and smoke. And I would walk along the bank until I found a really beautiful sound that I’d never heard a river make before—that was the primary criterion—and settle down to do some recording.”

This time, Lockwood used hydrophones, which allowed her to record under the surface of the water and in the still sections that she had skipped over when recording the Hudson. She had been introduced to hydrophones by the composer David Dunn who had made a piece based on hydrophone recordings he'd made of aquatic insects in Africa and North America. "So it made me think, when I was contemplating the Danube, that I can't only do the surface. There's so much happening underneath."

The resulting three-hour installation involves a circle of speakers, positioned equidistant so there is no front, back or side. The mix continuously moves among the speakers. There is a large map of the Danube which Lockwood commissioned from the cartographer Baker Vail. There is a mound of multi-colored rocks from the river bed collected during her travels, which audience members can pick up and touch, while listening to the sounds, and gain a sense of tactile connection to the river. We hear the river's most intricate hidden pitch patterns and cross rhythms, and the lifeforms it supports. There is the splashing of swimmers, the subtle sound of tadpoles hatching, the sounds of aquatic insects, bird song, sheep bleating and the rumble of the engine of a boat. Occasionally the sound of ringing church bells resonates through the mix. Unlike the Hudson installation, the voices of the river's inhabitants are interspersed into the mix, a flow of different languages and dialects. Rivers, Lockwood says, have agency. They compose themselves as they sculpt their banks and chart their relentless passage forward.

When speaking with Lockwood, it's remarkable how even after the six decades she has spent abroad, I still feel very much like I'm talking to a New Zealander. She still refers to New Zealand as "home" and talks about often being "homesick". There is an unassuming down-to-earth quality that belies the magnitude of her achievements. And so it's fitting that it was a unique development in her home country, the granting of personhood to the Whanganui River (Te Awa Tupua) in 2017, that encapsulates so effectively the values and transformation she has striven for in her art.

"Oh, it's fantastic," she told me. "I've been talking about it ever since, when I give a talk about the sound maps and the connection

between sound and the environment in general, I always refer to that. It's an amazing manifestation of how I wish we felt about our environmental forces, that we've exploited for so long. And it inspires people to hear about that. I'm so proud of my little country, that the government approached that wholeheartedly and enacted the necessary law. It's radical. Isn't it thrilling? Weren't you excited when that happened? This is a great model of how we can turn our attitudes towards natural phenomena around."

Footnotes

01. All quotes are from a conversation between the artist and writer in July 2020, unless otherwise indicated.

02. Beban, Daniel, "From the Banks of the River Danube: A Conversation with Annea Lockwood", *White Fungus* 9 (2008).

03. Ibid.

04. Thompson, Dave, "Stepping into the Glass World of Annea Lockwood", *Goldmine: The Music Collector's Magazine*, October 10, 2013, www.goldminemag.com

05. Ibid.

06. Beban, Daniel, "From the Banks of the River Danube: A Conversation with Annea Lockwood", *White Fungus* 9 (2008).

Biographies



Annea Lockwood is a composer and artist based in Compound, New York.



Ron Hanson is a writer and the founding editor of the international arts magazine *White Fungus*. Hanson founded the publication in 2004 with his brother Mark in Wellington, New Zealand. Since 2009, *White Fungus* has been based in Taichung City, Taiwan. In 2017, the Hansons received the inaugural Special Achievement Award for Contribution to the New Zealand-Taiwan Relationship at the ANZCHAM Business Awards in Taipei.



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