

**Robert Dow**  
**[10' 07"]**

***Precipitation within sight (2007)***

Over the last few years, my attention has been drawn to what are often considered by at least some composers and sound artists to be 'difficult' sounds to work with: everyday sounds whose source identity is often completely open (broadly speaking, environmental sounds, vocal sounds and instrumental sounds). The strong associative pull of such real world sounds and their tendency to create specific contexts, can make them difficult to integrate with more seemingly abstract sound. On the other hand, it is this very power that can make such sounds significant structural devices, and beyond this, expressive entities in their own right (within the context of a particular sonic work). Recognisable sounds have the potential to provide such things as drama, symbol, and metaphor in very direct ways, and in a manner intrinsic to a sound work. They need not be simply something 'value added' or 'extra-musical'.

With this attraction to the recognisable, has come my growing fascination for the concept of the sound image and how this image and its implied ('virtual') space is articulated within real space, for example within a hall or gallery. This has led very naturally to an investigation of both the photographic and the cinematic image, and the allusion to space and movement within these media.

***Precipitation within sight*** makes use of environmental source material collected in and around Smoo Cave in Durness (in the very North-West of Scotland) as well as, among other things, material derived from recordings of various brass instruments made within the studio. The piece was created very much with the cave in mind, the material designed to emerge from the natural sounds within the cave during its first performance. The cave's history is bound up with movement—it is precipitated out of the movement of ice, water, wind and rain and out of the movement of people.

It is easy wherever we live to become out of touch with the sounds of our environment: we have become used to only hearing sounds that scream at us to pay attention. Even when we are confronted with the tranquillity of the natural world, we find ourselves unable to listen, our ears still ringing with sound pollution. ***Precipitation within sight*** was intended to foreground the sounds of Smoo Cave and bring them to our notice.

***Precipitation within sight*** was realised in the Electroacoustic Music Studios at the University of Edinburgh and was premiered as part of the Highland Festival 2007 in Smoo Cave. It has been broadcast on Radio Scotland, Radio nan Gaidheal, Radio Ceentral (Belgium) and Radio Circulo, Madrid performed both at the *Soundings ...* festival in Edinburgh and in the George Cadbury Hall, Birmingham (BEAST 25th anniversary concert). Further performances planned for 2008 include: the annual RMA Conference, Aberdeen; Sound Junction 08, Sheffield; the Florida Electroacoustic Music Festival; the Santa Fe International Electroacoustic Music Festival; the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Spain; and SUNY, Stony Brook, New York.