



**LEEDS
ARTS RESEARCH
CENTRE**

TOLKA NIGHTS

DR MATT GREEN

OUTPUT INFORMATION

Title:
Tolka Nights

Output Type:
T – Other

Location:
Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, Ireland

Brief description of type:
Multi-component audio artwork

Year:
2015

Output allocation:
Avant-garde/experimental: aesthetics and practices



TOLKA NIGHTS

-SEPTEMBER-

THURS 10 (7PM) THE GRASSHOPPER INN, CLONEE, MEATH TOLKA PUB QUIZ	FRI 11(8PM) TOLKA VALLEY PARK, NEAR BLANCHARDSTOWN, FINGAL SCREENINGS AND PERFORMANCES	SAT 12 (6PM) NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS, DUBLIN SYMPOSIUM AND RIVER AMPLIFICATION
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THREE EVENING EVENTS EXPLORING THE RIVER TOLKA

New works by Matt Green, Sven Anderson, John D'Arcy, Jennie Guy, Conan McIvor and Stuart Sloan
ALL EVENTS ARE FREE BUT TICKETS ARE REQUIRED. FOR MORE INFO: WWW.TOLKANIGHTS.COM

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Tolka Nights was a series of public events that took place over three days at three sites along the River Tolka, Ireland. The events used sound, film, performance, and discussion to explore the river's significance as an ecosystem, to communities, and its role within historic and contemporary public affairs.

Dr Matt Green devised and developed the project through a three-stage commissioning process, securing a €66k grant. Green acted as lead artist, a role that included liaison with local business, civic and welfare organisations, Irish media, and the project funders: the Office of Public Works (OPW), Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Meath County Council and the Dublin-based arts organisation Create. Over a six-month period, the commissioned artists undertook site-specific practice-led research including audio-visual documentary and film-making, archival research, consultation with the river's residents, users and maintainers, and choral workshops. Drawing on Sarah Pink's 'walking with video' strategy, Green's research addresses the bridging of digital ethnography, digital art and socially-engaged practices for the purposes of place-based community development.

Through multidisciplinary public presentations of findings reached through creative practice, Tolka Nights reacquainted the river's locals with a geographic landmark whose significance had become overlooked and "forgotten" (TheJournal.ie , 2015) over time.

The research which underpinned Tolka Nights was also shared with professional and academic audiences at Invisible Places, the triennial conference of Sound, Urbanism and Sense of Place at the University of the Azores in S. Miguel Island, and at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, Ireland (2015), including a screening of the films produced as part of the project. These films were also shared at a conference at University of Huddersfield (2017) along with a paper on the project's process and findings. A DVD summary of the project was also produced and distributed by the project in 2017.

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TOLKA PUB
QUIZ

FRI 11 (8PM)

TOLKA VALLEY PARK, NEAR
BLANCHARDSTOWN, FINGAL
SCREENINGS AND
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Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council



Comhairle Cathrach
Shirén Árainn Claithe
Dublin City Council



comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council





Still from *Bat Hunting with Sean Meehan* by Matt Green

Courtesy of Matt Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Oqe-HsQh7g>



Still from *Kingfisher Spotting with Brian Carruthers* by Matt Green

Courtesy of Matt Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scbcyk-LpMk>



Still from *Trout Fishing with Des and Christy* by Matt Green

Courtesy of Matt Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpv7Oei4tso>

Tolka Nights was a series of public events that took place in three distinct sites along the river Tolka, Ireland over three consecutive nights in September of 2015. The events comprised sound, film, performance and discussion, and explored the river's significance as an ecosystem, to communities, to diverse histories, and to regional and national current affairs.

Tolka Nights emerged through the individual and collaborative practice of six artists brought together specifically for the commission: Matt Green, Sven Anderson, John D'Arcy, Jennie Guy, Conan McIvor and Stuart Sloan. The events contained both solo work by all the artists and activity designed and developed as a collective.

The three events were the outcome of the artist group's extended engagement with the river Tolka. In the months prior to the events, the artist group combed local libraries and media archives, and consulted with the river's residents, users and maintainers. Some members of the group focused on documenting the river through audio and video recording, while others carried out song-writing and rehearsal sessions at the river's banks, or investigated sites along the river as settings for experimental films.

The 'documentary' section of this website comprises an audiovisual account of the three events and a separate account of the artist group's work and activity leading up to these events. The 'event film' section comprises a series of short films made by the artist group, which were produced as part of the **Tolka Nights** project. These were shown within the second **Tolka Nights** event. The 'image' section gathers together both photos of the **Tolka Nights** events and of the group's prior onsite activities, which encompassed the Tolka's entire course. The 'credits' section gives details of the people local to the Tolka who the artist team consulted and who supported and contributed to **Tolka Nights**.

Tolka Nights was commissioned under the Per Cent for Art Scheme relating to the creation of flood defence systems on the River Tolka in catchment areas across Dublin, Fingal, and Meath. This commission was supported by the Office of Public Works (OPW), Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Meath County Council, and Create. The commission provided a dynamic platform for public art to explore new connections between the river Tolka and the regions surrounding it.

SYNOPSIS OF EVENTS

What follows is the original listing for each **Tolka Nights** Event:

Thursday 10th of September, 2015: Pub Quiz, Audiovisual Works and Hospitality

The opening event of **Tolka Nights**, held at the **Grasshopper Inn, Clonee** will be a Tolka Quiz enriched with riverside sounds, images and food inspired by Tolka edibles. The quiz will appeal to both those wanting to test their knowledge of the river and those wanting to learn and experience more of the river in an interactive, sociable setting. Quiz teams can expect rounds such as 'What's that Tolka Sound?' and 'Tolka or Not Tolka'.

Friday 11th of September, 2015: Screenings and Live Performances

The second event in **Tolka Nights** will present audiovisual work by the six artists on a full-scale outdoor screen with an immersive sound setup. Video works and live performances will merge over the course of the evening. The event setting is at the riverside deep within the **Tolka Valley Park** behind the Blanchardstown shopping centre.

Saturday 12th of September, 2015: Symposium and River Amplification

The symposium, to be held at the **College of Amenity Horticulture**, will reconsider the **Tolka Nights** project framework by introducing different perspectives concerning the river Tolka and its surroundings, and then by branching out to explore the experiences of artists, curators, and architects whose practice has led to projects executed in similar contexts. Whether they are based on working directly with public art commissions related to flood-defence works, or pursuing other water-based and river-based practices, these presentations form a common ground through a focus on bodies of water as a site of production. The symposium features presentations from: *Maryann Harris*(IE), *Klara Hobza* (DE), *Karsten Huneck / KHBT* (UK/DE), *Stephen Hurrel* (UK), and *Anne Mullee* (IE). Huneck and Hurrel will participate in the symposium via Skype. The symposium will be introduced by *Ruairí Ó Cuív* (Public Art Manager – DCC) and *Matthew Jebb* (Director – National Botanic Gardens), and moderated by *Sven Anderson*.

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Following the symposium, the evening will shift outside of the college and into the **National Botanic Gardens**. Complementing the sounds of the Tolka passing through the gardens, the **Tolka Nights** artists will present a unique sonic intervention, in which the sounds of the river (and of the productions that have emerged in response to it) are arranged within a distributed soundscape, shaped and formed through the participation of the audience. This fragile intervention occupies a marginalised space defined by short-range radio transmission, demanding a constant negotiation of a variety of sources and alluding yet again to the Tolka (or to a more universal river) as a convergence of disparate communities, interests, and ecologies.

ARTISTS

Matt Green is a lecturer, researcher and site-specific sound artist who holds a PhD in Sonic Arts. Matt's previous practice includes *Resounding Rivers* (2010), which was commissioned by Belfast City Council and PLACE, Belfast and explored Belfast's buried waterways via six concurrent sound installations housed externally throughout the city. *In Hear, Out There: Madrid* (2008) was a mobile sound work that addressed a culturally impoverished site in Madrid known as AZCA. For this work, Matt and his collaborators received a Spanish Ministry of Culture 'Culturas 2008' award. For each of Matt's installations and mobile works, including those mentioned, the practices of soundscape composition and field recording, the aural equivalent of photography and documentary, have been of importance (<http://mgreensound.com>).

Sven Anderson is an artist working between Ireland and the US since 2001. Anderson's work explores the act of listening within diverse architectural, physical, social, and emotional contexts. His practice is a discursive platform that operates through artistic intervention, academic publication, participatory processes, and interactive design. His public art project MAP: Manual for Acoustic Planning and Urban Sound Design with Dublin City Council received the European Soundscape Award issued by the European Environmental Agency in 2014. Within this project he is completing two public sound installations – *Glass House* for Smithfield Plaza and *Continuous Drift* for Meeting House Square – in early 2015 (<http://www.svenanderson.net/> | <http://map.minorarchitecture.org/>).

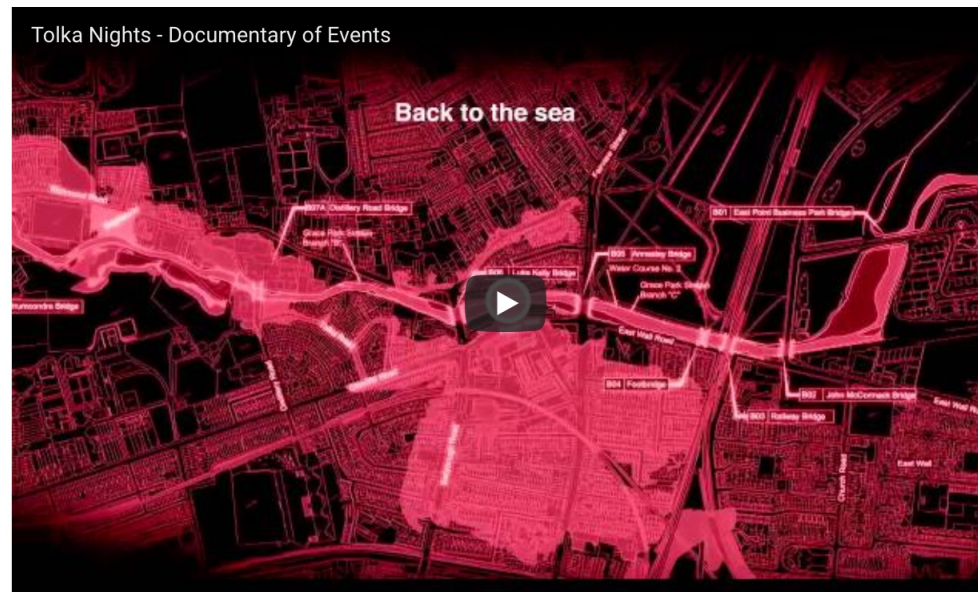
John D'Arcy is a composer based in Belfast at the Sonic Arts Research Centre. His work explores the relationship of voice, text and place – taking in a wide variety of formats including performance, installation, radio documentary and mobile apps. Recent projects include *Belfast City Choir*, an improvising singing ensemble open to vocalists of all abilities. John also works with young people, teaching audio recording and computer music to early-teens and undergraduate students. John has performed and exhibited work at Belfast Festival; International Samuel Beckett Festival, Enniskillen; and Sounds Alive Festival, Dublin; as well as broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster and London's Resonance FM (<http://www.johndarcy.com/>).

Jennie Guy is an artist and curator based in Dublin, Ireland. Her practice embraces visual, textual, performance, and event-based output, initiating both formal and informal collaborations and participative environments. These situations act as mirrors that destabilize the intent of both the creator and the observer, complicating notions of self, community, and the rituals surrounding artistic production, seeking new modes of observation and response. Recent projects include *JG→AP→JG* and *Melanchoy Park* for TULCA 2014; and *How to See Clearly from a Distance*, a commission for Galway University Hospital. She is currently working on a research residency with RUA RED (<http://www.jennieguy.com/>).

Conan McIvor is a filmmaker and video artist, his diverse practice spans from experimental film and video art to 'moving image' design for installation, theatre and performance. Exhibition highlights include: 'Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition' (Ulster Museum, 2014); Open University's public art commission 'Luminous, Curious, Journey' (Belfast City Hall, 2013); 'Denizen' (Belfast Exposed, 2014) and 'Arrivals', (Ormeau Baths Gallery, 2010). Conan was awarded the Visual Artists Ireland & Digital Arts Studio Residency Award in 2013. Conan's work concentrates on the metaphysics of the human condition exploring spirituality, relationships, the corporeal and the unfolding of consciousness with an ever-present undercurrent of the ethereal (<http://www.conanmcivor.com>).

Stuart Sloan makes video art-inspired documentaries and documentary-inspired video art. Moving to the USA in 2010, Stuart edited and co-produced the PBS Alzheimer's documentary *You're Looking At Me Like I Live Here and I Don't* and also edited *Collapse*, a fiction feature film concerning the San Francisco Ballet with Cannes and Sundance-winning Director Rob Nilsson, as well as *All Ears*, a documentary about instrumental hip-hop in Los Angeles, which premiered at SXSW in 2013. Now once more residing in Northern Ireland, he has recently completed *Towers of Belfast*, a personal and experimental documentary about his hometown, which premiered at the 2014 Belfast Film Festival. He is currently editing an experimental documentary about the river Foyle in Derry, as well as producing a video project on migrants to Belfast (<https://vimeo.com/user3213858/videos>).

DOCUMENTARY



Event Documentary

Tolka Nights culminated in three events over three consecutive nights between 10-12th of September 2015. The above documentary provides an overview of the content of these three events. Materials for the documentary were gathered by the artist group. The film was compiled by Stuart Sloan. Matt Green produced the audio.

Matt Green: Four Expeditions

Kingfisher Spotting with Brian Carruthers

Trout Fishing with Des and Christy

Otter Surveying with Barbara Freitag

Bat Hunting with Sean Meehan

Over the summer of 2015, as part of a wider exercise of documenting the river, Matt Green and colleague Stuart Sloan undertook a series of expeditions along the Tolka in search of the river's rarer and more elusive wildlife. A local river enthusiast knowledgeable of the animal being sought guided each expedition. Four of these excursions are recounted in four audiovisual compositions. These works include recordings of the conversations had as the river and its parklands were explored, and focused recording of the sights and sounds both encountered in these journeys and evoked by them.

Each of the four compositions seeks to impart the experience of the expedition it recounts: Each piece is invested with a sense of travel and of time spent in close connection with the river and river environment. The splendour and serenity of each setting is also evident. So too is the warmth and humour of each guide and his or her enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, the animal in question, and for and of the Tolka, the home of this animal.

Throughout each expedition, each guide annotated the river environment with anecdote, personal feeling and description. On the whole, this description referred to the features in the environment favored by the animal in question or suggestive of its presence, which each guide was greatly skilled in spotting.

As a result of the expeditions, of time spent with each guide, scenarios once unnoticed and unappreciated, such as the lone branch stretching out across the river, are now more apparent, sought out even, and excite. For these scenarios now suggest the possibility of an encounter with a lesser-spotted, much revered animal: Upon the branch might sit a kingfisher and below which might be a brown trout seeking solace from the sun.

The four works are intended as invitations to explore the Tolka for oneself and present a little of the insight of each guide as a means of heightening these experiences, bringing the walker closer to the environment.

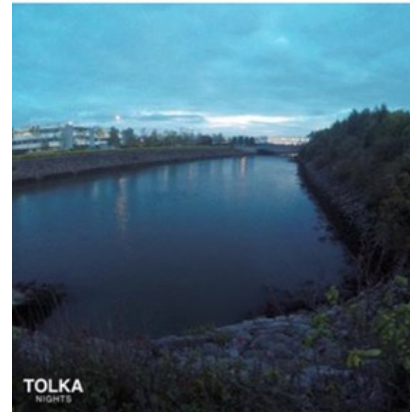
Matt Green is a sound artist. He is an advocate of the everyday soundscape with the belief that it can be as rich as any music and as awe-inspiring as any landscape. The four compositions uphold Matt's belief: Rather uncommonly, the image and soundtrack are balanced, they collaborate, and there is no musical score, in its place are the bold upfront sounds of the river environment.

Bat Hunting features Sean Meehan, a professional ecologist and member of the Irish Wildlife Trust, Dublin Branch.

Kingfisher Spotting features Brian Carruthers, an avid birder and Tolka advocate who maintains the facebook page Tolka River Valley Park. The film also features kingfisher calls used with the kind permission of the recordist David Jablonski.

Trout Fishing features Des Chew of Inland Fisheries Ireland and Christy Emmet of Tolka Trout Anglers Club.

Otter surveying features Barbara Freitag of the Irish Wildlife Trust, Dublin Branch and photographer John Fox of Birdwatch Ireland, Tolka Branch.





CREDITS

'Tolka Nights' is indebted to the following individuals and institutes who have contributed to the project, giving time and access to resources and sharing knowledge, memories, thoughts and ideas of and for the river Tolka.

Bronwyn Bolton-Warberg
Coolmine Musical Society (Participant in Tolka Chorus)

Des Chew
Inland Fisheries and Dublin Angling Initiative

Alan Dolan
East Wall Watersports

Christy Emmet
Tolka Trout Anglers Club

Barbara Freitag
Irish Wildlife Trust, Dublin Branch

John Harrington
Fingal County Council

Matthew Jebb
Director of the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin

Adrian Kennedy
Conservator (Participant in Tolka Chorus)

Billy King
East Wall Watersports

Niall MacCoitir
Nature in Irish Folklore and Mythology Author, and Irish Wildlife Trust, Dublin Branch

Mary McCamley
Councillor for Fingal County Council

Joe Mooney
East Wall History Group

Tony O'Doherty
Local Historian

Gerry O'Connell
Regional Projects & Emergency Services Division, Dublin City Council

Matt Robinson
Glasnevin Heritage

Brian Carruthers
Birder and Tolka Advocate

Áine Cody
Coolmine Musical Society (Participant in Tolka Chorus)

Ruairi O Dulaing
Senior Executive Parks Superintendent at Fingal County Council

John Fox
Irish Wildlife Photographer and BirdWatch Ireland, Tolka Branch

Ester Gray
Coolmine Musical Society (Participant in Tolka Chorus)

Maryann Harris
Biodiversity Officer at Dublin City Council

Philip Jennings
Safer Blanchardstown

Min Kim
Artist (Participant in Tolka Chorus)

Jim Lacey
Blanchardstown-Castleknock History Society

Dermot McCabe
BirdWatch Ireland, Tolka Branch

Sean Meehan
Ecologist and Irish Wildlife Trust, Dublin Branch

John Mulhern
Principal at Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture

Louie O'Flaherty
The Old Dublin Society

Martin Regan
The Grasshopper Inn, Clonee



Still from documentary of events surrounding *Tolka Nights*

Courtesy of Matt Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyE1F2JX8bg>



Still from documentary of the production process for *Tolka Nights*

Courtesy of Matt Green

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrQfJ_DbxiE

PRESS RELEASE

Tolka Nights Public Art Commission

Three evening events exploring the river Tolka

Thursday September 10th, 2015 at 7pm:
The Grasshopper Inn, Clonee, Meath.
Pub Quiz, Ambient Projection & Hospitality.

Friday September 11th at 8pm:
Tolka Valley Park, near Blanchardstown, Fingal.
Screenings & Live Performances.

Saturday September 12th at 6pm:
National Botanic Gardens, Dublin.
Symposium & River Amplification.

Tolka Nights is a series of public art events, funded under the Per Cent for Art Scheme, happening in September in three distinct sites along the river Tolka. The events will consist of sound, film, performance and discussion, and explore the river's significance as an ecosystem, to communities, to diverse histories, and to regional and national current affairs.

Tolka Nights has emerged through the individual and collaborative practice of six artists brought together specifically for the commission: Matt Green, Sven Anderson, John D'Arcy, Jennie Guy, Conan McIvor and Stuart Sloan.

The opening event of **Tolka Nights**, held at the **Grasshopper Inn, Clonee** will be a Tolka Quiz enriched with riverside sounds, images and food inspired by Tolka edibles. The quiz will appeal to both those wanting to test their knowledge of the river and those wanting to learn and experience more of the river in an interactive, sociable setting. Quiz teams can expect rounds such as 'What's that Tolka Sound?' and 'Tolka or Not Tolka'.

The second event in **Tolka Nights** will present audiovisual work by the six artists on a full-scale outdoor screen with an immersive sound setup. Video works and live performances will merge over the course of the evening. The event setting is at the riverside deep within the **Tolka Valley Park** behind the Blanchardstown shopping centre.

The final event of **Tolka Nights** will be a symposium of presentations about the Tolka, flooding, and work by other artists in response to similar themes. This will take place in the College of Amenity and Horticulture in the **National Botanic Gardens, Dublin**. Following these discussions, the audience will move outdoors for a closing sound event, dispersed within the garden's unique landscape set along the Tolka.

The events contain both solo work by all the artists and activity designed and developed as a collective. The solo work includes:

- A series of audio-visual compositions by **Matt Green** recounting expeditions along the Tolka in search of elusive wildlife.

- A short film by **Sven Anderson** and **Jennie Guy** exploring an impossible ecological event and a resulting series of disjointed planning proposals addressing the built environment surrounding the Tolka. This fractured narrative will be bookended by a live reading performance by Guy and an immersive soundscape performance by Anderson.
- A choral work of found-texts and improvised melodies composed by local singers in workshops led by **John D'Arcy**.
- An experimental film by **Conan McIvor** that attempts to chart the timeline of the river through a collection of vignettes; a journey through the mythical, spiritual, historical and contemporary stories associated with the Tolka.
- A documentary short by **Stuart Sloan** that explores how humans affect the Tolka and how the Tolka affects humans.

These projects are the outcome of the six artists' extended engagement with the Tolka. Over the last several months, the group have been working through local libraries and media archives, and consulting with the river's residents, users and maintainers as a means of grasping the river's intricacies. Some members of the group have focused on documenting the river through audio and video recording, while others carried out song-writing and rehearsal sessions at the river's banks, or investigated sites along the river as settings for experimental films. The artists are not attempting to narrowly define the Tolka and its significance, but instead suggest a collective of actions and responses that invite continued explorations along the river.

Tolka Nights was commissioned under the Per Cent for Art Scheme relating to the creation of flood defence systems on the River Tolka in catchment areas across Dublin, Fingal, and Meath. This commission is supported by the Office of Public Works (OPW), Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Meath County Council, and Create. The commission provides a dynamic platform for public art to explore new connections between the river Tolka and the regions surrounding it.

All events are free and open to the public, but booking is required via Eventbrite.

For more information about **Tolka Nights**, including bookings for the events, please visit:

www.tolkanights.com

Social Media:

www.facebook.com/tolkanights

www.twitter.com/tolkanights

www.instagram.com/tolkanights

PUBLIC ART



John D'Arcy, Tolka Nights Choral Performance, Friday 12 September 2015



Tolka Edition at the Tolka Quiz, Grasshopper Inn, Clonsilla, Friday 11 September 2015

Moody River

JOANNE LAWS REPORTS ON 'TOLKA NIGHTS', A SERIES OF PUBLIC EVENTS THAT INCLUDED FILM SCREENINGS, PERFORMANCES AND DISCUSSIONS, WHICH TOOK PLACE IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS ALONG THE RIVER TOLKA, DUBLIN, 10 – 12 SEPTEMBER 2015.



Jennie Guy, Tolka Quiz, Grasshopper Inn, Clonsilla, Friday 11 September 2015



John D'Arcy, Mapped Screen for Tolka Chorus, Tolka Valley Park, Friday 12 September 2015

PUBLIC ART

IN May 2014, Create (the national development agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts) launched a Per Cent for Art commission, funded by the Office of Public Works, arising from the creation of flood defence systems along the River Tolka – Dublin's second largest river. Proposals were invited from artists working in any medium to engage selected sites within Meath, Fingal and Dublin City local authority areas, using the Tolka as a 'central connector'. Following a two-stage competition, the commission was awarded to a collaborative proposal by six artists: Matt Green, Sven Anderson, John D'Arcy, Jennie Guy, Conan McIvor and Stuart Sloan. 'Tolka Nights' comprised three public events which took place over consecutive evenings across distinct locations in the Tolka region. Soundscapes, moving image works, performance and dialogue converged, inviting audiences to engage with the river's multi-layered histories, ecosystems and communities.

PUB QUIZ, AMBIENT PROJECTION & HOSPITALITY

With the river Tolka running nearby, the family-run Grasshopper Inn, Clonsilla, provided an ideal setting for a quintessential opening event: the Tolka Quiz. Having appropriated the pub's in-house media system, the artists ingeniously augmented the traditional pub quiz format with interactive, multimedia elements including maps, films and audio clips. Jennie Guy worked with the Grasshopper Inn's chef to source and prepare a tasty selection of Tolka-inspired food and drinks, including smoked trout, plum chutney, blackberry jam and locally-baked soda bread, as well as nettle tea, berry cocktail and elderflower cordial.

With John D'Arcy as charismatic quizmaster, an entertaining evening of river trivia unfolded. Rounds such as 'Stream of Consciousness' and 'What's That Tolka Sound?' pitched specialist knowledge alongside multiple-choice questions, conveying the substantial knowledge amassed by the artists on local history (medieval battles, ecology (flora, fauna), literary references (Beckett, Joyce) and folklore (Irish mythology, ghosts, iconography). Many of the community groups attending the quiz had worked with the artists at different stages; however this was the first time members of these groups – BirdWatch Ireland, Irish Wildlife Trust, Anglers Association, Mulhuddart Walkers Group and Coolmine Musical Society – convened in one place. Several members also donated prizes, including a book on *Myths, Legends and Folklore* by local writer Niall MacCoitir, tickets to Coolmine Musical Society's Christmas production and a wooden wishing well hand-crafted by members of Mulhuddart Mer's Shed.

There is something rather heart-warming about public displays of specialist knowledge, and such fanaticism was abundantly valued within the Tolka Quiz, creating a galvanising gesture within the community setting, while simultaneously broadening interpretations of 'what artists do'.

OUTDOOR SCREENINGS & LIVE PERFORMANCE

The second iteration of 'Tolka Nights' comprised an evening of film screenings on the riverbanks of Tolka Valley Park, where cinematic projections shimmered against a dusky magenta sky, as vibrant light installations cast kaleidoscopic shadows on surrounding trees. Though moderately hampered by wet weather, the sounds of raindrops hitting the viewing gazebo's canopy merged with cascading river sounds to form a fittingly immersive watery soundscape. Matt Green's series of four short films documents his Tolka expeditions with local wildlife enthusiasts to track elusive river animals: kingfishers, trout, otters and bats. Each opening scene is dominated by audible footsteps through the undergrowth. Working in tandem with the films' visual elements, audio was generated through complex field recordings to intensify the river experience. In *Bat Hunting* with Sean Meehan, paranormal night vision footage is compounded by sonar soundscapes emanating from the guide's bat detection device. Across each film, conversations merge with personal, descriptive and anecdotal accounts of the river, embodying the solace people frequently find in nature.

Similarly, Stuart Sloan's *In Truncated Waters* employs documentary techniques to explore symbiotic relationships between humans and the Tolka. A narrator reflects on modern-day agricultural and industrial pollution which severely impacts on the river's wildlife. Archival TV footage conveys recent floods (attributable to climate change and deepening floodplains) which resulted in the evacuation



John D'Arcy, Tolka Nights Choral Performance, Tolka Valley Park, Friday 12 September 2015



John D'Arcy, Mapped Screen for Tolka Chorus, Tolka Valley Park, Friday 12 September 2015

of nearby homes. The film concludes with reverie, proposing harmonious use of the river, utilised in summer by families for leisure pursuits and during winter by seabirds flocking to calmer waters.

John D'Arcy worked with local residents and singers to develop *Tolka Chorus* – a lyrical composition of found texts and improvised vocals which 'recreates the sounds of the river, its communities and its localities'. Against a monochrome background, a map of the river appeared luminous, mimicking a satellite navigation interface, with an orbicular 'O' place-marker visibly channelling the mouth and inching down-stream. Layered, whispered voices mirror the twists and turns of the river, marking the sites where memory and historical continuity persist, and building to a sea-shanty crescendo where the river enters Dublin Bay between East Wall and Clontarf.

Taking its title from a nineteenth-century poem of the same name, Conan McIvor's *Our Lady of the Tolka* pans the river's mythologies and histories, drawing on the 'trance film' tradition of 1940s avant garde cinema to depict a dreamlike scenario – part flashback, part haunting – through a series of monochromatic vignettes. Distorted, post-industrial soundscapes add dramatic tension. A female apparition dressed in white emerges from the river, interpreted as the Virgin Mary, who features ubiquitously in shrines along the riverbanks. Bearing witness to destructive forces from the Middle Ages, the woman channels Viking invasions and the Battle of Clontarf, summoning storms and floods in one final ritualistic act, aimed at restoring the river.

Before the Flood (2015), by Sven Anderson and Jennie Guy, explores a fictional ecological scenario. The film is narrated from the perspective of a young planner, appointed Temporary Flood Commissioner following catastrophic flooding in the Tolka region. Crisp black and white footage pans a suburban Modernist housing estate as the planner recounts four potential solutions: entombing the river in concrete, propagating plants in grid-like formations, housing 'reconstructed plants' in landscaped shopping centres; and constructing boardwalks to traverse the floodplains. The monologue was discerningly assembled from research probing urban planning, neo-futuristic architecture and shopping-mall design, and narrated by Irish architect and environmentalist Duncan Stewart, who lends

plausibility to these impossible events. A live percussive soundscape and reading performance by the artists accompanied the screening.

SYMPOSIUM & RIVER AMPLIFICATION

The final instalment of 'Tolka Nights' was a river-themed symposium, held in the College of Amenity and Horticulture in the National Botanic Gardens. Director Matthew Jebb ruminated on the Tolka as a 'moody' river, 'leaky barrier' and northern boundary-marker for the Botanic Gardens, which makes the urban site feel intrinsically 'rural'. Mayrann Harris commenced by outlining Dublin City Council's Integrated Constructed Wetlands for Tolka Valley (1999 – 2000) – an infrastructural project she implemented within the Parks and Landscape Services Division. The region's industrial history since the eighteenth century has comprised brick kilns, forges, mills, pasture-lands and abattoirs, while twentieth-century landfill practices ceased in the 1970s with E.U. environmental directives. Continued protection of the Tolka's biodiversity necessitates ongoing strategies to manage pollution, invasive species and anti-social behaviour. A measure of the project's success is the return of salmon to the Tolka after nearly 100 years.

As symposium moderator, Sven Anderson seamlessly managed the technical arrangements for speakers participating via Skype. Including Karsten Huseck (K&H Architects), who discussed a major flood-related commission for the River Ness, Scotland. Currently at planning stage, K&H's design draws on a rich legacy of British seaside architecture, boardwalks and piers to focus on ideas of 'connecting the public to the water'. Pitched as a playful architectural intervention, *Gathering Place* is a multi-purpose viewing-platform, shelter and bridge, echoing the counterweight motion of a seesaw. Also participating via Skype, Glasgow-based artist Stephen Hurrell outlined several river-based projects including *Zones* – An Audiology of the River Clyde' (1999) commissioned by Tamaw, Glasgow, to reflect on the Clyde's post-industrial landscape. Hurrell produced a soundtrack from field recordings and Scottish TV archives, disseminated via an audio boat tour. Developed in collaboration with social ecologist Ruth Brennan, 'Sea Stories' is an online interactive map documenting the cultural knowledge, oral traditions, place-names, stories and songs of Barra Island in Scotland's Outer Hebrides. 'Clyde Reflections' (2014), commissioned by Creative Scotland, comprises interviews with islanders to elucidate scientific, ecological and philosophical perspectives on the Clyde.

Anne Muller outlined her recent curatorial project 'The Artist's Armada', for which artist-made watercrafts were launched onto Dublin's Grand Canal last July. The expedition comprised several artists' vessels including Mark Redder's communally-built Irish curragh and *Brown Serenities*, crafted by The Good Hat Chery from a tree felled during Hurricane Katia. Seoidín O'Sullivan's anchored raft hosted *Floating Dialogues*, addressing water politics and the commons. While rigorous planning was essential, Anne views the more performative, risk-taking elements as defining features of the project.

After living in America for almost a decade, Czech artist Klara Hobza commenced a 30-year project 'Diving Through Europe', to find ways of synthesising Europe's diverse cultural histories. Following a scuba-diving trip to Istanbul, she began training with a mentor in the Black Sea. The artist concluded that she is frequently asked 'Why are you doing this?' (She has no interest in 'colourful folk...'). 'Reality', she concluded cheerfully, 'has a way of providing you with material experience, often in the form of obstacles'.

Moving outdoors for the closing event, audience members were given handheld radio receivers and invited to wander through the Botanic Gardens, where a series of short-range radio transmissions had been dispersed. Colourful spotlights near the riverbank created a festival feel. Periods of static fizz governed the direction of people's footsteps, until snippets of conversations, voices and music came into frequency range, feeling like a treasure hunt for close-listeners. Like the two other 'Tolka Nights' events, this sonic intervention hinged on the collective artists' impressive technological proficiency and was activated ultimately by audience participation to great effect.

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Recalling the River – The River Soundscape in the Site-specific and Social Practice of Tolka Nights

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ABSTRACT: Tolka Nights was a series of public events that explored the social, historical and ecological significance of the River Tolka, Ireland. Produced by an interdisciplinary team of six artists, the events took place in three distinct sites along the river in September of 2015. This paper outlines the project with particular focus on the aurally-engaged activities of two members of the artist team: Matt Green's field recording, film-making and sound installation practice and John D'Arcy's participative choral workshops and performances.

KEYWORDS: public art, site-specific, social practice, collaborative, interdisciplinary, field recording, location sound, film sound, sound art, sound installation, voice, improvisation.

1. Introduction

This paper concerns Tolka Nights, a series of public events that took place at three distinct sites along the River Tolka, Ireland over three consecutive nights in September 2015. The events comprised sound, film, performance and discussion, and explored the river's significance: as an ecosystem, to communities, to diverse histories, and to regional and national current affairs.

Tolka Nights emerged through the individual and collaborative practice of six artists of varying disciplines brought together specifically for the commission: Matt Green (project lead), Sven Anderson, John D'Arcy, Jennie Guy, Conan McIvor and Stuart Sloan. The artist group undertook an extensive programme of site-specific engagement that included onsite documentary and ethnographic activity; archive research; consultation with the river's residents, users and maintainers; choral workshops; and film-making.

Tolka Nights was commissioned under Ireland's Per Cent for Art Scheme, a government initiative that assigns one percent of the budget of any public development to arts commissioning. This project was commissioned within a flood defence development programme managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The commission was devised and supported by the OPW, three council boroughs through which the river Tolka passes (Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Meath County Council) and Create, an Irish arts agency specialising in collaborative arts in social and community contexts.

This paper commences with an overview of the context of the commission followed by an overview of the artist group's engagement and research process, and delivery of the three public events. The discussion then focuses on the practices of Matt Green and John D'Arcy of the artist team, whose work and activity engaged the river soundscape. The paper outlines Matt Green's location sound and field recording activity, and the application of his Tolka sound archive in the soundtracks of four films based on expeditions along the Tolka in search of the river's rarer and more elusive wildlife; as well as within a sound art intervention in the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin. The paper also describes the development and performance of Tolka Chorus – a collaboration between John D'Arcy and local amateur singers that involved sound-walking, vocal improvisation, environmental sound, and curation of literary texts regarding the Tolka.

2. The River Tolka

The Tolka is one of three main rivers that pass through the city of Dublin, the others being the Liffey and the Dodder. The Tolka flows from west to east, rising north west of Dunboyne in County Meath, and travels thirty kilometres through North Dublin culminating at Dublin

Bay. Over its course, the river passes through farmland, woodland, parkland, residential and industrial districts.

The name Tolka is derived from the Irish for ‘flood’. Because of the Tolka’s flat gradient and unsympathetic development, the river is prone to flooding and causing severe disruption and damage when such occurs. Large scale flooding is expected every 50 years. Flooding on a smaller scale occurs much more regularly.

Tandem to the OPW’s flood defence work over the last decade, the three council districts through which the Tolka passes have invested considerably in improving the health of the river and extending and enhancing the river’s green spaces. A highlight of Dublin City’s work is the production of a four kilometre ‘greenway’, an off road cycle route through newly developed parkland and constructed wetlands¹. In 2011, after an absence of more than 100 years, wild salmon were found to be living in the Tolka once more. This was attributed to both the OPW’s removal of weirs and each council’s effort to decrease pollution levels.² Unfortunately, pollution continues to be a problem for the river and this alongside flooding and crime in the river’s parklands continues to dominate the press and public image of the river.³

The river catchment in the Fingal county district in particular has undergone much development in the last quarter century, predominantly within Ireland’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ period (mid-1990s to mid-2000s). Within this district, in addition to the introduction of green space, developments have also included new road networks, a major retail park, several industrial sites and housing. The demographic of the river reflects that of Dublin as a whole: over the last quarter century, the river’s populous has grown and diversified considerably.

3. Overview of Tolka Nights

3.1. The Process of Tolka Nights

The artist team were awarded the commission in March 2015 after a three-part application process. They adopted a site-specific approach, creating work in response to engagement with the localities and communities of the Tolka. The group’s approach did not centre upon final production outcomes but rather a strategy for interdisciplinary collaboration and action at the river, and with the river’s communities. Each artist devised their own programme of community and/or institutional engagement based upon their specific skills and interests. Each artist was paired with another of the group to carry out and document their activities. This documentation was then fed into the production of three public events.

1. For details of the Tolka Greenway: <http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content//RecreationandCulture/DublinCityParks/VisitaPark/Documents/Tolka%20valley%20Greenway.pdf>.

2. For details of salmon returning to the Tolka: <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/salmon-return-to-the-tolka-river-after-100-years-26776249.html>.

3. In 2015, a detergent company pleaded guilty to discharging detergent in to the Tolka that resulted in the death of an estimated 5000 fish (<http://www.thejournal.ie/river-tolka-fish-kill-2252276-Aug2015/>).

Matt Green’s artistic engagement primarily comprised field-recording activities and a series of recorded river-walks with individuals whose work or recreation encompasses the green spaces of the river. Stuart Sloan accompanied Green to carry out video documentation of the river-walks. Sloan also researched and collated archive broadcast media pertaining to the river.

John D’Arcy facilitated Tolka Chorus – a series of choral workshops with local amateur singers that involved improvisation with environmental sounds and song-making based on archive texts about the river. These workshops were documented by Conan McÍvor who, in his project worked with local heritage services to research art and literary texts inspired by the Tolka.

The third pairing in the artist team, Sven Anderson and Jennie Guy, consulted civil servant stakeholders in the river’s maintenance, including the OPW’s ‘Engineer-in-charge’ of the Tolka’s flood defence program. They further explored governmental publications on the Tolka, and drew comparisons with other rivers around the world.



Figure 1. Tolka Nights event poster.

3.2. The Three Events of Tolka Nights

In a collaborative response to the individual and group activities that formed the research and engagement process stage, the artist team produced three public events (Figure 1.) comprising audio-visual presentations and live performances. Each event's distinct format was informed by the form and function of the specific riverside venue in which it was presented.

The first event, a Tolka River-themed pub quiz, took place at The Grasshopper Inn, Clonee, Co. Meath. Quiz teams were made up from the communities and organisations with whom the artist team had liaised and collaborated with during the earlier process stage. The quiz questions were derived from knowledge shared by these communities and organisations, and each group donated a prize that was awarded to the winner of a specific quiz-round. This format provided an opportunity for groups to meet and share their unique branches of knowledge, and artefacts, in a celebration of the river that unites them. The evening was enriched with food and drink produced from local riverside edibles and audiovisual production throughout the pub featuring riverside sounds and images captured by the artist team.

The second event features an outdoor screening of a programme of original films shown on a large screen erected in Tolka Valley Park, near Blanchardstown. The films screened at this event were produced by the artist teams, both individually and in their collaborative pairings. The subject and material of each film was derived from each artist's activity in the process stage. The event also included a coloured illumination of the river and a performance of Tolka Chorus, the choral group assembled by D'Arcy.

The third event commenced with a symposium at the College of Amenity Horticulture, situated by the Tolka as it passes through the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin. This featured artists and architects speaking about their work with rivers both in Ireland and further afield, programmed by Anderson. The symposium was followed by a sound art intervention featuring a multichannel sound installation and mobile sound hunt devised by Green and Anderson.

4. The Soundscape in the Four Wildlife Films of Matt Green

4.1. Green's Engagement Process

Over a six-month period prior to the three public events, Green travelled the full length of the Tolka in an effort to document the river in sound and video from a variety of perspectives. These perspectives included those of the river's wildlife, inhabitants and users, as well as hard-to-reach perspectives such as underwater, which Green sought to acquire through use of microphone and camera technologies. During most of Green's time spent at the river he was accompanied by Stuart Sloan. Sloan captured still and moving image documentation whilst Green recorded sound.

Green programmed his documentation of the river as a series of expeditions for which he would draw up maps and involve local guides whose work or recreation concerns the river.

One of these expeditions included a three-day cycling trip travelling back and forth along the river, engaging in prolonged periods of listening and sound recording activity (Figure 2.). The most significant of Green's interactions were a series of eight organised walks with individuals knowledgeable of the river's flora and fauna; a focus of Green's from the outset. The documentation of four of these excursions were compiled in to four films that were screened at the second event of Tolka Nights.



Figure 2. Matt Green fishing for sound at the Tolka.

4.2. Four Wildlife Walks

Green and Sloan undertook four expeditions along the Tolka that were specifically in search of the Tolka's rarer and more elusive wildlife. Each expedition was guided by a local river enthusiast knowledgeable of the animal being searched for. Sean Meehan led the search for bats, Brian Carruthers for kingfisher, Barbara Freitag for Otter and Des Chew and Christy Emmet for trout.

In each of the four walks, Green observed and shared in each guide's interaction with the river environment as they pursued a particular animal. Green also encouraged each guide to verbalise their activity as they went. This annotated each walk with further information, anecdote and opinion pertaining to the wildlife, the river and its environment. Green and his guides were fitted with a wireless lavalier microphone to capture their conversations. Sloan, acting as cameraman, would occasionally join the conversation but most often stayed behind Green and the guide, recording them from a distance. Use of the wireless microphones as opposed to a boom microphone, meant Green was more mobile and the job of recording was less tasking, hence Green was able to stay in better contact with the guide.

Furthermore, Green and Sloan found that ‘indirect’ surveillance of the guide elicited less nerves and restraint than, for example, a straight-to-camera interview.

Green conducted the four wildlife walks with reference to the ethnographic practice of ‘walking with video’ that Sarah Pink both termed and defined (Pink 2007). Pink comments that ‘walking with’ can “bring us closer to understanding how other people perceive their multisensory environments, constitute place through everyday practice and live ‘in their bodies’” (Pink 2007, 246) and that video “provides us with a tool that can enable embodied communication about, empathetic understandings of and representations of other people’s perceptions of their environments” (Pink 2007, 245).

4.3. Four Wildlife Films

Four films were produced to illustrate the wildlife walks undertaken by Green, Sloan and their invited guides. Each of the four films includes selections from the conversations that took place as the river and its parklands were explored, and recording of the sights and sounds both encountered in these journeys and evoked by them.

Each of the four films seeks to impart the pleasurable experience of the expedition it recounts. The films attempt to communicate a sense of travel and of time spent in close connection with the river and river environment, as well as the splendour and serenity of each setting. Moreover, the films attempt to convey the warmth and humour of each guide and his or her enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, the animal being searched for, and for and of the Tolka, the home of this animal.

Elsewhere (Green 2011, 17), with reference to phenomenological geographer Edward Relph, Green has stated that much of his artwork seeks to adapt or enhance an individual’s ‘sense of a place’ (Relph 1976, 63) and lists a number of ways of doing so. One of the methods outlined by Green is to change the individuals’ orientation and/or ‘intention’ (Relph 1976, 43) towards a place. With the four films, Green once more employs this tactic: Through inspiring interest in an animal, awareness that it inhabits the river and knowledge of the factors of its habitation, Green seeks to encourage the audience to visit the river and its parklands, and once there, to engage more deeply with the environment in a manner approaching that of the wildlife guides. This tactic recalls the motives of psychogeography. Christina Ray and David Mandl comment that psychogeography is “about exploring or experiencing the physical landscape in new ways: trying to find what’s marvellous, life-affirming, or at least exciting about seemingly mundane places – or transforming them to make them more marvellous, life-affirming, or exciting”.⁴

4. Quote taken from an interview with Ray and Mandl in the build up to 2nd annual Psy.Geo.Conflux conference, which they co-organised. The interview is here: http://gothamist.com/2004/05/10/christina_ray_dave_mandl_psygeoconflux.php. This quote can also be found in (Pinder, 2005, 391).

4.4. Sound in the Four Films

At the forefront of the soundtrack to each film is the voice of each guide. The guide’s speech was captured close up, close to the body, with little treatment in post-production. As a result of this sound quality and the accompanying images, each film adopts a first-person perspective for much of its duration and this perspective is that of the guide. This supports the aim of the audience empathising with, and taking on to themselves, some of the guide’s ‘ways of being in the world’ (Pink 2008, 181). In addition, clearly in two of the films but arguably in all of the films, there are points in which the ‘point-of-view’ and ‘point-of-audition’ (Chion 1994, 90) are from the perspective of the pursued animal. This is done both because of the aesthetic of their perspective and to encourage the audience to empathise with this animal and their ways of being the world.

In addition to the dialogue, the soundtrack contains river ambience and activity. These elements were derived from field recordings taken by Green within the course of his engagement with the river. The majority of these recordings were captured along the route of each guided wildlife walk but at a later time. Prominent in each soundtrack is the sound of walking through undergrowth and upon dirt tracks and stony banks as well as wading through water. In terms of texture, these sounds are true to the environments explored but they are presented exaggerated, ‘hyper-real’ (Chion 1994, 99). As such, these sounds foreground the sense of travel and give dynamics, rhythm and interest to each soundtrack. Furthermore, the sound of footsteps appears exaggerated in an effort to express the multisensory nature of walking.⁵

The walking sounds serve an additional purpose. These sounds are applied across scenes to help build the sense of one coherent journey across space and time. Conventionally in film including documentary, music would usually serve such a purpose as well as provide dynamics, rhythm and interest. Music is also often employed to convey the emotions of characters or give colour to scenes.⁶ In the four films, there is no music (at least not in a classical sense). In the place of music, there is the ambient sound of the river environment comprising primarily the sound of flowing water. This sound is regarded as being relaxing and symbolic of peace, vitality, good health and purity.⁷ The river ambience imbues each film (and indeed the real environment each film depicts) with these qualities.

Green’s four films share the approach of the documentaries analysed by Strachen and Leonard (2015). In these documentaries, the soundscape “has a crucial role to play and cannot be understood simply as a complementary bed always in service of the other elements”

5. With regard film, Marks comments “the audiovisual image necessarily evokes other sense memories” and “through intersensory links: sounds may evoke textures; sight may evoke smells” (Marks 2000, 213). Pink quotes Marks in a similar discussion of the capacity of film to illicit sense impressions beyond those directly engaged by the medium (Pink 2015, 172).

6. “Music provides continuity, covers up edits, facilitates changes of scenes, provides mood, offers entertaining spectacle, allows for narrative interludes and montage sequences, and comments on action” (Ruoff 1992, 229).

7. The qualities of flowing water mentioned are raised throughout (Symmes 1998).

(Strachen and Leonard 2015, 166). For Green's four wildlife films, the soundtrack was drafted first and images were added to this. Constructing the films in this way reversed the usual hierarchy in which "image, dialogue and music are prioritised over locational sound" (ibid.). Sounds were selected on their own merits rather than because they best suited an image. Moreover, in the four films, sound and image do not always align, which Strachen and Leonard suggests encourages the audience to "listen aesthetically" (Strachen and Leonard 2015, 174). Additionally, sound alone commences and ends each film and throughout each film there are moments in which the screen goes black, which places further emphasis upon the soundtrack.

4.5. Film Screening in Tolka Valley Park

The four films were produced for the second event of Tolka Nights – the outdoor screening event at Tolka Valley Park (Figure 3.). In addition to Green's four films, three other original films produced by the artist team were shown: Anderson and Guy's *Before the Flood* (2015); Sloan's *Troubled Waters* (2015) and McIvor's *Lady of the Tolka* (2015). Green's *Kingfisher Spotting with Brian Carrathurs* (2015) opened the event, and his remaining three wildlife films were sequenced in alternation with those of the other artists. Green's kingfisher film struck the group as an appropriate opening given it's beginning with an invitation from Carrathurs to walk to the river. The remaining three films because of their position in the programme, their short length and positive tone, appeared like adverts for visiting the river, a welcome byproduct of the event programming that empathised with Green's intentions of ecological advocacy.

Each film in the programme approached the Tolka differently. Whilst Green's four wildlife films mostly avoided negative aspects of the river, these were at the fore in other films. Whilst Green's films were naturalistic and affable, other films such as that of McIvor were much more abstract and assertive. McIvor described his film *Lady of the Tolka* as a 'trance film' informed by durational video art practices. McIvor's soundtrack was comprised entirely of ambient music: a large contrast to the aesthetic of Green's wildlife films.



Figure 3. Film screening in Tolka Valley Park.

5. The Sound Art Intervention of Event Three

The third event of Tolka Nights consisted of a symposium and a sound art intervention entitled 'river amplification' on event promotional materials. The symposium was held in the College of Amenity Horticulture situated in the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin. The river amplification was staged in the gardens across a knot of pathways leading away from the college and crossing the Tolka. The river amplification comprised a river illumination, a multichannel-channel loudspeaker installation and a sound-hunt accessed through use of handheld radios distributed to the audience. The intervention took place at twilight, a time when the gardens are usually closed to the public. The intervention provided opportunity for the audience to interact with each other, the gardens and river; participating in the production of a sonic artwork that augmented, annotated and animated the river's soundscape.

5.1. Multi-channel Sound Installation

The installation comprised four large speakers mounted on subwoofers that were placed in a clearing by the river situated directly beneath the college (Figure 4.). Two of these speakers faced away from the river towards a grassy incline that runs alongside the college. The remaining two speakers faced towards a footbridge beneath which there is a weir and through which the Tolka runs. Played through the speakers was a composition of ten water textures which Green recorded within his expeditions along the river in the months prior. Each texture first faded in and then out on the first pair of speakers, those facing the grassy incline away from the river. As a texture faded down in the first pair of speakers, it subsequently faded up in the second pair. As the texture faded down in the second pair of speakers, a new

texture faded up in the first pair. The composition included various river flows; underwater sound; wading through water; a thunder storm; and light woodland rainfall. Some textures were big, bold and bassy whilst others lighter, softer and airier.

The speaker stacks were capable of emitting very loud sound (they had in the week prior to Tolka Nights been used at Electric Picnic, a 50k capacity music festival). Whilst the speakers did not emit volumes at anywhere near their capacity, the river sounds were amplified much beyond their natural level. From the grassy incline, certain textures such as the underwater texture provided an intense and visceral experience: the sound strengthened by reverb engulfed the listener and the bass was strong enough to be felt throughout the body. This experience was intended to produce a feeling of immersion, as close as one might get to being submerged in the river without getting wet. Moreover, at such times, the river was impossible to ignore. The river appeared to demand attention, something which in the past it has lacked.

From the footbridge, towards which the second pair of speakers faced, both projected sound and the real river were audible. The river at this point runs with pace down a weir and is resultantly quite loud. At this location, the projected sound served not to amplify but augment. The textures accented the real river sound and over time transformed this sound, as though the river were shifting through its many guises; or carried by the river were images of itself from further upstream and further back in time.

Away from both the incline and bridge, the projected textures could be heard to move to and fro across the river, and reverberate throughout the undergrowth and canopy of the gardens. At such a vantage, the installation served to articulate the surrounding geography, express the scale of the river's influence and unify the radio projections of the sound hunt.



Figure 4. Sound Installation in the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin.

5.2. Sound Hunt

Through use of short range radio transmitters, twelve sound zones were dispersed across a knot of paths in the botanical gardens. At the exit to the college, which led down to the main installation area, the audience were provided with radios through which the dispersed sounds could be accessed. Participants were also handed a somewhat cryptic list of titles for each sound zone and informed of the radio frequency at which all zones were audible. Most participants undertook the walk in a group or pair, either each with their own radio or sharing.

Audible in each zone was a sound composition derived from the media and recordings of the two previous events or the raw materials of the artist team's process stage. The compositions included edited versions of the soundtracks to the films shown the previous night; a recording of the Tolka Chorus; a recording of the first event's quiz; the final episode of 1960s TV soap opera 'Tolka Row'; and various field recordings.

Green devised the sound hunt with support from Anderson. Green's previous work includes a number of what he terms 'mobile sound walks' (Green 2011, 2). These comprise sounds mapped across space that can be accessed through GPS-enabled devices equipped with headphones. On this occasion, the more primitive technology of radio was selected for a number of reasons: Firstly, radios are everyday devices and have made familiar the concepts of tuning 'in to' signals, and being 'in range' or 'out of range'. Radios also signify a condensing of time and space: through the radio one can access the sound of far away activity with accuracy and immediacy. Hence, one may more willingly perceive the radio installation as a 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1984), a space in which other spaces and times coexist and can be accessed. Secondly, radio static resembles the broadband frequency spectrum of water sound. This supports the illusion that one is tuned to and listening to the river. Thirdly, the sound hunt was inspired by Green's bat hunting on the river in which a device much like a radio was employed to access the ultrasonic calls of the bats. Green found the experience of hunting out bats (hearing the first call through the static of the bat detector) thrilling and sought for the sound intervention to be similarly pleasurable. Indeed, one zone comprised a composition of bat calls. Fourthly, the radios came with speakers so sound could be played out loud. This enabled participation in the event's soundscape, encouraged sharing of the experience and gave the event more of a communal atmosphere – attempting to provide a sense of community, which is a known quality of the radio medium (Truax 2001, 10).

In addition to locative media practices (Hemmet 2006), underpinning and informing the radio installation was, as with the Green's films, psychogeographic methods. Like Debord's alternative map of Paris (Pinder 1996), the request for the audience to search out sounds was a request to inhabit and engage with the site and river differently and perhaps go on to regard the site and river differently: the river's significance to the gardens and its catchment more evident, the activity of listening to and at the river more likely. Cristina Kubrisch's

'electrical walks'⁸ and Janet Cardiff's 'audio walks'⁹ make similar requests of their audience and were an inspiration to the sound hunt.

6. Tolka Chorus

Tolka Chorus was a series of riverside vocal workshops coordinated by John D'Arcy. Through the processes of critical listening, musical composition and vocal improvisation, these workshops invited local residents to engage with both the soundscapes of the river and a selection of archive material relating to the river's environmental and social histories. These activities facilitated the participants in their development of a songbook with an accompanying animated score for public performance as part of the second event of Tolka Nights.

D'Arcy's approach in Tolka Chorus had been previously developed in the production of a series of participative choral events presented under the moniker Belfast City Choir. These included site-specific performances by organised ensembles (*Letterkenny and Moving Song*, 2013) as well as participative actions by members of the public (*On the Move*, 2013; and *Literary Lunchtime*, 2014). The events of Belfast City Choir were each led by D'Arcy's printed verbal performance instructions for non-expert vocalists. These instructions encouraged individual and group exploration of a specific site through engagement with environmental sound, literary texts, oral histories, performative ritual, sound poetry, musical improvisation, acts of détournement¹⁰, and inclusive performance practices. It was the aim of Tolka Chorus to engage a group of residents in Dublin and Meath with these elements as a means to explore their local riverside environment.

Tolka Chorus invited participants from a number of schools, colleges, choral societies and community groups in the river's catchment area. From this, a group of amateur singers was formed. Each participant had experience with classical choral music as well as personal memories of the river and its histories. This project gave the majority of the group their first experiences in sound-walking, group vocal improvisation, and graphic and verbal musical notation.

The workshops and performance were shaped by a dialogue between D'Arcy and the participants about how the group might explore the sounds of the river, its communities and histories through vocal performance. Drawing influence from site-specific sound works such as Susan Philipsz's *Lowlands* (2010), a public installation based on folksong, and Brian

Irvine's street-opera *Things We Throw Away* (2014); it was decided that the group should perform vocally at riverside locations so as to immerse themselves and the audience in the locale.

The group identified two key methods of vocally sonifying the river: (1) vocalising riverside environmental sounds in mimicry and sound poetry; and (2) giving voice to the river's social and ecological histories in lyric and melody.

6.1. Vocalising Environmental Sounds

In order to recreate environmental sounds, the group underwent a variety of vocal exercises that compartmentalised some discreet parameters of vocal sound production such as pitch, timbre, amplitude envelope, etc. These exercises were influenced by the inclusive music-making practices of John Stevens and Brian Dennis (Stevens 2007, Dennis 1975). The group practiced attending specifically to the timbral details in their vocalisation as they explored forms of sound poetry: paralinguistic sounds, non-semantic vocables and glosolalia. The sounds emerging from the group formed something of an acoustic lexicon as they began to discuss and imitate local environmental sounds – both in literal and abstract interpretations.

To augment this activity, participants conducted walks along a section of the riverside in Mulhuddart that took in areas of lush vegetation, forest, suburbia and arterial roadways. The group engaged in critical listening exercises influenced by Pauline Oliveros's *Deep Listening* (Oliveros 2005). This prompted further consideration of the distinct parameters of individual sounds as they emerge and propagate in the wild, as well as the density and texture of the overall environmental soundscape. At certain points where pathways intersected the river, the group stopped to perform echoes of the natural soundscape. Upon returning to the indoor workshop space, the group listened to a selection of the local animal calls and underwater soundscapes recorded by Matt Green. This was an opportunity to listen 'deeper' and observe timbres, melodies and textures that hadn't revealed themselves during the daytime walk in Mulhuddart.

The group then vocalised a short musical piece structured as a riverside journey along the River Tolka. As a visual guide the group looked to a series of large-scale maps of floodplains along the river. This improvised performance contained a variety of aural textures ranging from sparse rural scenarios to dense industrial dirges. Over the course of multiple performances, the group began looking at the illustrated flood plains as a graphic musical notation. The changing colour and span of the flood extent at different points in the river's journey towards Dublin Bay could be interpreted as changes in pitch, volume and timbre for individual voices, or the overall density and texture of the group's soundscape. Using the floodplain maps as a graphic score for a vocalisation of environmental sound would ultimately become the undercurrent of the group's live performance piece.

8. For details of Kubrisch's electrical walks: http://www.christinakubisch.de/en/works/electrical_walks.

9. For details of Cardiff's audio walks: <http://cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/>.

10. The politicised subversion of existing productions and media through adaption and manipulation of recognisable characteristics – observed and categorised in the context of Situationism by Guy Debord and Gil Wolman (Debord and Wolman 1956). In the works of Belfast City Choir, detoured elements include classical performance contexts, Western counterpoint and harmony, and the original literary text sources.

6.2. Giving Voice to the River in Lyric and Melody

In addition to vocalising the environmental sounds of the river, the group felt it was vital to give voice to the river's social and ecological histories in the form of spoken and sung texts. The group consulted a range of source material including news archives collected by D'Arcy, historical literature collected by McIvor, and oral history statements collected by Guy. The participants grouped these into categories of ideas and issues that they felt were pertinent. These included pastoral tranquillity, industrialism, ecological pollution, the riverside Battle of Clontarf (1014), and personal memoirs of riverside landmarks.

The group listened to musical examples where archive material was used as lyrics and in response began performing their own text sources in forms including verse-structure, improvised melodies, mash-ups, drones, echoes, chants, and graphic melodic notation based upon year-on-year Tolka flooding data. The group used verbal music notation as a means of defining these musical adaptations of the archive text sources. It was hoped that the plain language of verbal music notation (as opposed to traditional Western musical notation) would provide a comparable starting point for performers of all levels of musical experience, as well as engender opportunities for improvisation.

The group chose seven lyric sources, each married to a distinct compositional and performance mode. 'It's Not Flashy' adopted the typographic musical notation informed by Hugo Ball's *Karawane* (1916). Here, the dates of flooding occurrences were printed in different sizes relating to their devastation – this would inform the performer as to how aggressively they should chant the texts aloud.

'Best Kept' and 'Cool Water' invited melodic improvisation, echoes and tonal harmonies for the performance of the archive texts about positive aspects of the river. 'Best Kept' described Dublin's National Botanic Gardens ("In the bustle of the city majestic trees buffer against the noise and fumes"); whilst 'Cool Water' described the shared experiences of diverse communities living at riverside accommodation in Mulhuddart ("Old and New Irish honouring the differences [...] similar customs [...] similar cultures [...] similar traditions"). In contrast, the verbal musical notation for 'Waste of Water' asked performers to recite quotations from news articles about Tolka ecological disasters as "a polluted flow of sound", and to "contaminate the lyrics of others".

It was hoped that the verbal notation for performance would evoke a range of visual, oral and aural processes and thus prompt critical responses to the texts undergoing recitation – an opportunity for an individual performer or listener to reflect on the Tolka soundscape from multiple perspectives.



Figure 5. Tolka Chorus in Tolka Valley Park.

6.3. Performance at Tolka Valley Park

The performance of *Tolka Chorus* at Tolka Valley Park (Figure 5.) took the musical structure of a journey along the Tolka. This followed on from the group's improvisations based on flood-plain maps during workshops. For public performance these maps were adapted into an animated video by McIvor that was projected on the large screen at Tolka Valley Park. This allowed both performers and members of the audience to observe the map during performance. This animation acted as a graphic score that notated the changing position of the group's conceived geographical location.

Participants vocalised environmental sounds in response to the changing location and correlating extent of the Tolka flood-plain on the animated map. The seven text pieces were each designated to a distinct location along the map in reference to their conceptual underpinning (e.g. 'No Man's Land' was positioned at Dublin's industrial M50 roundabout; 'The Heron' was located in the pastoral townland of Piercetown, Meath). Upon arrival at a song destination the black background of the animated map burst into colour and an onscreen title indicated the change in mode to a text performance.

The performers were amplified with microphones and accompanied by pre-recorded fragments from their rehearsals. This bolstered both the density and reach of the vocal soundscape. The group also distributed songbooks that allowed audience members to read the text pieces and their accompanying verbal music notation, with the introduction: "Tonight you are invited to join in the chorus."

Tolka Chorus sought to give voice to communities and ecologies of the river, fostering new personal connections between participants, listeners and the local environment. By

attentively listening to their surroundings and letting their own vocalisations resonate through the landscape, the voices of *Tolka Chorus* demonstrated an alternative mode of aural engagement with the river.

7. Conclusion

Renowned Irish author and playwright, Samuel Beckett described the Tolka as one of Dublin's "infernal streams" (Nixon 2008). Whilst the Liffey proudly flows through the heart of Dublin, adorns tourist postcards and serves as an emblem of the city in literature, music and art; the Tolka flows through the margins of Dublin and, perhaps as a result of this, is marginalised. Industrial and urban development in Dublin has pushed the Tolka further and further out of eye and earshot, and resultantly out of the minds of many. When the Tolka rises back up, back in to consciousness, it generally does so either through flooding, pollution outbreaks or the accommodation of criminal acts. At these times, the attention the Tolka receives is understandably unfavourable.

Through public exhibition and performance, Tolka Nights sought to bring attention of a positive kind to the river. The events also sought to foreground the multi-faceted significance of the river and in doing show the river to be deserving of increased attention.

What the Tolka has in common with the Liffey and with rivers around the world is that it unifies in its single name a myriad of diverse people, geographies and histories. The river binds Dublin City with the townships of Meath; agriculture with manufacturing and recreation; the Battle of Clontarf with fish kills incidents. In its passage through territories, the river sets up a network of interdependency: upstream impacts downstream, downstream impacts upstream. In the process of Tolka Nights, the artist team sought to investigate, experience and creatively respond to the Tolka's variety. The three events of Tolka Nights in their wide range of both approach and content underscored the Tolka's variety. The events also sought to bring distinct communities together and spark discussion and interaction between these communities with regards the river that they all share.

The river soundscape was central to Tolka Nights. Through listening, recording, and studying the Tolka soundscape, Green ascertained a greater understanding of the Tolka's diversity. During Green's guided expeditions, the soundscape mediated encounters with the river's most captivating animals. The Tolka soundscape contributed music to Green's documentaries of the expeditions and helped convey the narrative of these journeys; and in doing helped express the worth of the river. The sound intervention of the third Tolka Nights event used the soundscape as a means to bring 'the real river' into the work; to magnify the river; draw the audience's attention and evoke their interactions. The sounds of the river evoked similar interactions between the participants of Tolka Chorus, allowing D'Arcy to facilitate musical composition and improvisation of an experimental nature that

attended not only to the riverside soundscape, but also to the social, historical and ecological contexts of the locale.

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