

Emily Doolittle: composer/zoömusicologist



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Emily writes: These are grey seals on the Isle of Bute in Scotland. They howl like wolves, and also respond to music. I enjoy going to sing and play music for them. I'm now writing a piece based on Gaelic mythology about seals.



A Saanen goat in the countryside near Asolo, Italy. (Photo: Emily Doolittle)

Emily writes: I am interested in looking at the relationship between animal songs and human music, both as a composer and as a scholar. I've written a number of pieces that explore this relationship in a variety of ways, ranging from transcribing animal songs to using recordings of animal songs as raw material for electronic music to trying to compose in the manner of a particular species of animal. My most recent large-scale work based on animal songs was *Reeds*, written for the Umbrella Ensemble reed trio and dancer Camille Renard for the Newfoundland Sound Symposium in 2010. For this outdoor, site-specific work I transcribed the songs of the birds that could be expected to be heard at Oxen Pond in St. John's, Newfoundland, throughout the course of a year. I am currently

working on a piece for children's choir and chamber ensemble, for the Paragon Ensemble and Voice Factory Youth Choir of Glasgow, UK, which is based on Gaelic folklore about seals and music.

As a scholar I've explored whether animal songs can be considered music in the same sense as human music, and have also looked at how people in different time periods and cultures use animal songs in their own music. Currently I am collaborating with biologists to look at the song of the hermit thrush, musician wren, and others from a dual musical and scientific perspective.



A grey jay that Emily encountered on a hike in the Cascades, a couple of hours from Seattle. "I like them because they come and eat food from your hand. They are also known as 'camp robbers'!"

Selected Publications

Doolittle, Emily, and Bruno Gingras. 2015. Zoomusicology. *Current Biology* 25: R819-R20.

Doolittle, Emily L., Bruno Gingras, Dominik M. Endres, and W. Tecumseh Fitch. 2014. Overtone-Based Pitch Selection in Hermit Thrush Song: Unexpected Convergence with Scale Construction in Human Music. *PNAS* 111, no. 46: 16616-21.

- Doolittle, Emily, and Henrik Brumm. 2012. O Canto Do Uirapuru: Consonant Intervals and Patterns in the Song of the Musician Wren. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies* 6, no. 1: 55-85.
- Doolittle, Emily. 2008. Crickets in the concert hall: A history of animals in Western music, *Transcultural Music Review* 12.
- Doolittle, Emily L. 2006. *Other Species' Counterpoint: An Investigation of the Relationship between Human Music and Animal Songs*. Doctor of Philosophy. Princeton University.



Emily in Wyoming. (Photo: Erika Kinetz)

Compositions Based on Animal Song

night black bird song (1999). 8:00; for two flutes and three percussion; commissioned by SCI/ASCAP for the New York University New Music Ensemble. Recorded on Capstone label.

Why the parrot repeats human words (2005). 19:00; for narrator, clarinet, viola, and percussion; based on a Thai folktale; commissioned by the Canada Council for Meduse (based on a folktale about birds).

Le loup, la chevre et le chevreau (2005). 9:00; text by Lafontaine; for soprano, tenor, 8 flutes, cello; commissioned by the Nova Scotia Arts Council for Alizé (includes a wolf howl).

all spring (2004). 18:00; for soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, bass (or cello), and percussion; text by Rae Crossman; commissioned by the Canada Council for the Motion Ensemble. I. five o'clock; II. all spring; III. have you; IV. ruffed grouse; V. just when.

Hatchlings (a set of six) (2009). 7:00; for baritone and piano; commissioned by Giles Herman (about turtles).

vocalise (for bees) (2008). 3:00; for solo mezzo-soprano; commissioned by Miranda Loud.

Social sounds from whales at night (2007). 8:00; for soprano and electronics; commissioned by Canada Council for Helen Pridmore.

Ruby-Throated Moment (1999). 3:30; for solo high soprano; for Wendy Humphries.

music for magpies (2003). 7:00; for viola da gamba with quarter-tone frets (or cello or viola); for Karin Preslmayr (based on the pied butcherbird; hoopoe lark; ringed river snike; pileated pocket grouse; and green-rumped antstalker).

Shimmering (2008). 1:00.

Emily's "Pied butcherbird" is the first movement of a five-movement work (see "Zoömusicologists" page for audio link).

Emily writes: *Music for Magpies* (2003) is a collection of transcriptions of real and imaginary birdsongs. Pied butcherbird song was what inspired me to write this piece. I heard a recording, and it was so musical/composer-like that I wanted to transcribe the song to get closer to it. The transcriptions of the real bird songs are based on recordings from Jean C. Roché's *Les grands virtuoses: Les plus beaux chants d'oiseaux*. I ended up quite interested in the musical result, so then I transcribed the hoopoe lark song. The piece was originally intended for viola da gamba with quarter-tone frets, but can also be performed on cello or viola.

pie'd butcherbird

violin version

Accidentals apply to the adjacent note(s), and to groups of notes beamed together. Accidentals do not carry over the octave.

$\text{♩} = 200$
flowing and lively
notes slightly detached from each other

delicate fast tremolo

(very slight accent) *p* *mp* *p* tapping on wood of violin

12 x 7

ringing

mp *p*

12 x 7

p *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

bold

3 3

21 x 7

delicate

mp *mf*

3

let resonate

mp tapping on wood of violin

9 x 7

ringing

mf *mp*

3

8 x 7

mp *mf*

3 3