

# SONIC ART AS METAPHOR & MYTHOLOGY

*Keith Halpin*

Sound Design Lecturer, University of Gloucestershire  
khalpin@glos.ac.uk

A sound event is symbolic when it stirs in us emotions or thoughts beyond its mechanical sensations or signaling function, when it has a numinosity or reverberation that rings through the deeper recesses of the psyche.  
(Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer).

The author examines and explores the use of soundscape elements, mimetic sound-identities and spectromorphology to form metaphor and myth. A metaphor creates new links between otherwise distinct conceptual domains (Landy, 1991). Mythology is a vital feature of every culture. Myths are specific accounts in a time and place that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience.

In our culture pictures have become tools used to elicit specific and planned emotional reactions in the people who see them. In calling up these deep emotions and memories, however, today's images have taken on new meanings and have created new myths that are shrouded-often deliberately-by these deeper memories. Sound also plays a pivotal part in shaping and recalling primitive emotions and memories.

It is proposed that electroacoustic music is a powerful medium capable of being used to arouse emotions, which manifest themselves in mental imagery, ultimately resulting in a formidable experience. Mythological themes in an unspecified time and place can be created, imagined and abstracted through electroacoustic music. The modern electronic composer has the power to guide this significant assignment through the interplay of a dominantly mimetic or a dominantly abstract sonic syntax. The listener is forced to re-evaluate their spectromorphological investigations in terms of a new reference point (Norris, M). This sort of covert and overt interplay can very powerfully affect the way a work is apprehended, and thus the structuring that the listener imposes. Therefore sound-images specifically spectromorphological (sound transformations) lead the listener to a deeper symbolic mythical reference point (Wishart, 1996). Moreover electroacoustic music is a vehicle for the communication of mythical idea/narrative. A large amount of Gestalt research is concerned with grouping and specifically to the way things are put together. Gestalt, meaning, "*form*", proposes that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Therefore the auditory system has its own version of "*perceptual completion*" (Levitin 2006). We are born with a predisposition toward interpreting sound, for instance if we hear a bird chirping outside the window our sensory perception forms a mental image of a bird. Composers can use this predisposition to

skillfully influence their audience's emotions and generate mental images.

Daniel J Levitin (2006) states:

Recording engineers have also learned to create special effects that tickle our brains by exploiting neural circuits that evolved to discern important features of our auditory system.

Goldberg (1992) explains that studies of the brain during a music therapy method known as guided imagery and music (GIM) present further insight into the connection between music, emotion and imagery. Goldberg argued that music "triggers emotions", which in turn "stimulates imagery".

The author will present and outline the symbolic relevance of combining two different sound-images to create new and thought-provoking meanings specific to mythology. The author will also discuss relevant composers and their postproduction techniques involved in constructing an electroacoustic composition for the communication of mythical idea/narrative.

Finally, several sound transformations will be played on loudspeakers to confirm the validity of his findings.

## 1. REFERENCES

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## **2. ARTIST BIOGRAPHY**

Keith Halpin is an Irish electroacoustic composer & sound designer working in acoustic, computer media, radio, TV & film.

Keith has an MA in Music Technology from the University of Limerick, BA in Media Production and HDip in Audio Engineering. He is an active member of the Audio Engineering Society and has extensive practice teaching undergraduates in a range of Music Technology disciplines.

Keith is a Senior Sound Design Lecturer for Gloucestershire University. He teaches Sound Aesthetics. This module progresses beyond basic approaches to sound in visual broadcast and looks in more depth at using sound as a form of creative expression and narrative structure. He is also the lead Sound Designer for King Sound Studios in Sydney, Australia.

His research interests include the use of soundscape elements, mimetic sound-identities and spectromorphology in composition to form metaphor and myth. Other interests include sound design for moving image and cloud based sound production applications.