BEYOND THE STUDIO
Embedding the island in music production on the Isle of Eigg

[Received September 5th 2020; accepted 25th November 2020 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.108]

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ABSTRACT: Over the last four decades a number of recording studios have been developed on small islands. The first group of these were in warm water locales, exploiting the standard appeal of the tropics as places of rest and tranquillity. More recently a number of studios have developed in cold water islands, promoting the natural environment (and sometimes less than temperate weather) as encouraging reflection and creativity. This article analyses one aspect of the latter, in the form of the Visitations artist-in-residency programme run by Lost Map Records on the Scottish Isle of Eigg. Several of the musicians who have participated in residencies collected sounds from around Eigg that were embedded in original compositions. This has involved the extension of the studio space into the landscape in a process that stands in contrast to the traditional role of studios to insulate recordings from the external world. This article identifies that the first series of Visitations residences produced musical engagements with Eigg that represent the emotional geographies experienced by the musicians in relation to the landscape, providing more locally grounded projects than those produced in more traditional studios on warm water islands.

KEYWORDS: Recording studios, islands, soundscape, Eigg, Hebrides, Visitations

Introduction

a. Islands as sites of creativity

Geography, experience, and imagination are all crucial to how we take measure of islands. Prime foci of legend and invention, islands have haunted humanity since the dawn of history... On islands we feel alternately landed and adrift, magnified and reduced, fulfilled and voided, at home and in exile. (Lowenthal, 2007: p. 202)

Islands, and particularly small islands, are often the site and/or subject of creative endeavours within artistic fields – aspects exemplified by the Fogo Island Arts project in Newfoundland (Carroll, 2017) or ‘art islands’ such as Teshima in Japan (Suwa, 2020; Qu, 2020). The pervasiveness of islands in Western mythology, literature, art and media has been described as ‘islomania’ – an obsession with islands (Gillis, 2007: p. 247; Brinklow, 2015: p. 98). Several island scholars have explicated that it is the geographical
particularities of islands, and especially small islands, that create a distinctive sense of place that is unreplicable in continental regions. This distinct sense of place resulting from boundedness and separation from elsewhere has been termed ‘islandness’ (Baldacchino, 2007) and shima (Suwa, 2006). Boon, Butler and Jefferies state that the “unsettled boundary between the solid and the liquid”, of island space, “is a potent site of theoretical possibility, potential and dreaming” (2018: p. 1).

Secondly, islands are sites for experimentation and novelty not just within artistic fields but also within entrepreneurship, jurisdictional administration and development agendas (see Baldacchino, 200a and 2010b). Much of this creative experimentation and dreaming on islands occurs within the cultural economy (also called the ‘Orange Economy’ in some regions - see Gaviria Roa, Castillo and Montiel Ariza, 2019), which includes craft industries, fashion, entertainment, tourism service industries, music and media (Scott, 1999: p. 807). Many islands have developed their cultural economies through drawing on and marketing their islandness (see Johnson, 2012 for a discussion of Jersey’s use of islandness in place branding). Many small islands have particularly employed their islandness to develop their tourism sector. While warm-water islands trade on images as places where sun, sea, sand (and sometimes, sex) combine with local delicacies and performances of local music to create an immersive, multi-sensory break from reality; cold-water islands trade on their ability to provide an elemental experience where tourists must face the possibility of wind and rain in a rugged landscape (Baldacchino, 2006a and 2006b). Therefore, whether warm-water or cold-water, the volume of creative material produced in islands (in addition to marketing and branding activity) has seen many islands become highly mediatised places (Baldacchino, 2012; MacKinnon and Hannan, 2017).

Historically, artists have sought inspiration from natural landscapes away from industrial cities (Badham, 2017). Islands have a particular allure for artists and creatives who want to be ‘islanded’; ie to be separated from their mainland lives, and to be closer to nature in order to gain inspiration from their surroundings both terrestrial and maritime (Brinklow, 2013: p. 40). In recent decades the artist’s stay on an island has often been in the form of an artist-in-residence scheme where they are given the opportunity to experiment, learn and create with relative freedom and open-ended outcomes (Lehman, 2017). Some examples of such residences are Rabbit Island Residency in Lake Superior (USA), whose website identifies that its programs “provide time and space to investigate and challenge creative practices in a wilderness environment” and L’Artocarpe in Guadeloupe, which encourages culturally diverse practitioners to engage with the Caribbean island’s landscape and history. That is not to say that such residencies, even with creative freedom, are without frictions or issues of power between artist and stakeholders (see Lithgow and Wall, 2017). Since academic attention has been primarily focused on visual art residencies (for example Foster and Lorimer, 2007; Stephens, 2001) with little analysis of musical residency programmes (see Higgins, 2012), this article provides a case study that addresses this dearth of research.

In this article we analyse the tracks produced on the Isle of Eigg as the first phase of the Visitations musical residency programme (2017-18). We conduct this analysis informed by podcast interviews about each musician’s experiences on Eigg available on the Visitations website. Each artist records a short interview with the owner of the host company, Lost Map Records, during their Visitations residence and then a year later after they have had time to reflect upon and consider their time on the island and record subsequent reflections. We examine how the artists describe their creative process in relation to being islanded on Eigg and how they used sounds to create tracks that were in part a response to
their emotional geographies of the island. We consider how the artists responded to their terrestrial and maritime surroundings, and how, if at all, they interacted with other living beings during their residency. In essence we strive to better understand how musical residency artists represent aspects of Eigg. While Island Studies scholars have done much to increase understanding of island music and island songs (for an overview see Hayward and Konishi, 2017; Baldacchino [ed], 2011) there has yet been little exploration of people travelling to islands to produce music which is then primarily consumed by those outside the island.

b. Island Recording Studios

Since the 1970s, recording studios have been designed to “simultaneously isolate the studio from the outside world... and to impart a desired acoustical/reverberant character on the sound as it propagates inside the space(s)... and in nearly all cases this results in near complete visual isolation as well” (Bates, 2020: p. 127). Equally, sound insulation is also designed to prevent noise nuisance and complaints from nearby residents in densely populated areas (Newell, 2017). A number of studios were established on Caribbean islands in the 1970s and 1980s, including Compass Point in Nassau (Bahamas), Blue Wave in Barbados and AIR (Associated Independent Recording) in Montserrat. AIR is particularly significant. It was set up by a trio of British producers in 1979 and its facilities and warm-water island appeal attracted big names from both the British and American music industries such as Elton John, Dire Straits, The Police, Marvin Gaye, The Rolling Stones, Black Sabbath, Duran Duran and others over the course of a decade. In 1989 Hurricane Hugo, a Category 5 storm, devastated Montserrat and the AIR studio was badly damaged and forced to close. The ruins of the facility remain on the island (see Schuessler, 2016).

Advances in recording hardware and software, together with increasing affordability, have resulted in something of a ‘democratisation’ of the recording industry, with many smaller, more specialised and lower-cost studios being established in recent years (Leyshon, 2009; Goold and Graham 2019). In Europe, several of these newer studios are located on islands, such as Ocean Sound Recordings on Giske island, Norway. Its website strapline reads, at “the end of the world, on the edge of the sea, lies Europe’s most stunning recording facility”. The owner of the studio, describing its success, states that “the backdrop of nature aids creativity” (Stocks, 2017: online). The environment outside the studio is therefore considered an integral element in the recording process, and an important marketing tool.

In the past twenty years several studios have been established on islands within the British Isles including Black Bay Studio and Wee Studio on the Isle of Lewis, The Space studio and the Starling Studio on Orkney, Mareel Studio in Shetland, and East Point Studio on Osea Island, in Essex.1 In the marketing for each of these studios there is a reference to the natural surroundings. Shetland Arts’ web page on Mareel states that Shetland is “a perfect place to ‘get away from it all’ so you can concentrate completely on your project”. Black Bay Studios website claims that Lewis is:

\begin{quote}
a place like no other - the ultimate escape from the rest of the world - somewhere to lose yourself completely in music whilst watching the ever-
\end{quote}

\footnote{1 For a map of these island recording studios see UK Island Recording Studios (nd: online).}
changing ocean and tides. Between takes, clients enjoy access to coastal walks... and in winter months Northern Lights and incredible star-filled skies.

East Point studio’s website states it “enjoys spectacular sea views that will inspire each and every project” and the Space Studio website claims “It will appeal to those who wish to develop and realise their artistic project in a beautiful and secluded setting”. It is evident that these British island recording studios consider their ‘islandness’ an advantage in the creative process, the ocean acting as a psychological breakpoint in time and space between the distraction and busymess of continental norms and the quieter freedom of ‘the island’. They employ this islandness in the same way that cold-water islands use their nature and elementally based allure to entice sojourners (Baldacchino, 2006b).

The Isle of Eigg and Lost Map Records

The Isle of Eigg is a kidney-shaped island, approximately 25km off the West coast of Scotland in an archipelago called the Inner Hebrides (Figure 1). Together with Rum, Canna, and Muck, the four make up a sub-archipelago called the Small Isles. Eigg has an estimated population of 105 (Isle of Eigg website), up from 64 in 1997. For 800 years Clan Ranald ruled Eigg before it was sold to academic Hugh MacPhearson in 1828 for the sum of £15,000. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries Eigg was bought, sold and transferred between numerous landowners (lairds) before being bought by the community in 1997 under a Scottish government-backed land reform scheme. The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust was established as the community organisation to administer the island and manage socio-economic development strategies. The Trust has established three subsidiary companies: Eigg Trading Ltd owns and manages the island shop, post office, tearoom, craft shop and tourist facilities while Eigg Electric manages the island’s electricity grid. Eigg is frequently referred to as the UK’s most “eco-friendly” island (see Wills, 2017) due to 100% of its electricity being generated by a combination of wave, solar and wind power. Finally, Eigg Construction was set up to renovate and repair local infrastructure. Since the community buyout the island has gained a reputation for having an entrepreneurial spirit (Chmiel and Bhattacharyya, 2015) and developed a reputation as an eco-friendly tourist destination (Creaney and Niewiadomski, 2016). However, the transfer to community ownership was not without its issues as there were reports of tensions between traditional Eigg families and newer residents (Scott, 2003). One result of demographic change is that today only three of the island’s residents (3%) speak Scottish Gaelic regularly compared with 17% in 2001 (NRS, 2003).

Lost Map Records was established on Eigg in 2013 by musician Johnny Lynch, also known professionally as Pictish Trail, who came to live on Eigg from Glasgow. Lynch describes the micro-label as “unshackled by style or genre... formed with a pioneering spirit to reassess how we discover and explore music amid the disorientating digital geography of the 21st century” (webpage copy). In 2017 Lost Map Records began its residency project called Visitations. Participants are set up in a secluded bothy cabin, where Lynch provides accommodation, supplies, recording equipment and instruments, and have a week to create music inspired by their stay on the island. The project is funded in part by the Scottish Government’s arts organisation, Creative Scotland, and by subscriptions to the series. Visitations echoes the open-endedness of traditional residency programmes, as Lynch states:
Artists are invited to spend one week in solitude in a bothy on the Isle of Eigg. No specific remit - just freedom to experiment and create the music they fancy making. (Visitations website nd.).

The results of the week are released on vinyl and as a digital download in the form of an EP as part of the subscription along with a free accompanying podcast interview (usually one episode recorded on Eigg and another after a period of time when the artist has returned home). To date there have been six residencies (the first three of which are analysed here), all of which have involved musicians making some types of environmental field recordings that Lynch describes as having been “reflected back in the music,” noting that the results have been “pretty cosmic... it can get very experimental” (Bakare, 2020: online).

Figure 1 - Map showing the location of Eigg and the western Scottish coast (Wikimedia Commons)
Visitations

In this section we consider and analyse the recordings and accompanying podcasts of three artists – Monoganon, Free Love and Slow Tree – in order to assess their engagement with Eigg, in the music, lyrics and artistic processes. Monoganon is the creative identity of John McKenna, a multi-instrumentalist originally from Carluke in Scotland but now residing in Malmö, Sweden. The original expectation was that McKenna would produce two tracks over the seven-day residency for a single seven-inch vinyl release through the Lost Map label. McKenna ended up creating seven tracks, and given the depth of material created, a decision was made by the label and McKenna to release four tracks on a vinyl EP and the other three were included in a subsequent digital release. Free Love are a Glasgow-based duo of Suzi Rodden and Lewis Cook, who prior to the residency had released tracks under the name of Happy Meals for various labels. For the Visitations project Rodden and Cook produced four tracks, three of which were predominantly electronic instrumentals and one more conventional electronic based pop song. The theme of alien abduction formed a conceptual basis for the tracks, a theme that Cook described could be something that listeners either “choose to be involved with or not be involved” as desired (Visitations, 2020c). Slow Tree consists of two members of the band British Sea Power, Neil Hamilton and Aby Fry, who visited Eigg in November 201, from their home on the Isle of Skye. They brought minimal instrumentation with them, just a guitar, viola and keyboard. In addition to the 4 tracks released on the Visitations Series I EP, the duo also made a 43-minute film of their time on the island entitled Life On Eigg, which is available on YouTube.

Figure 2 - Neil Hamilton of Slow Tree outside the bothy (still from Life on Eigg video)

a. Terrestrial Sonic Experimentation

Both McKenna and Slow Tree spent a good deal of their residency outside the studio collecting sounds to use in their tracks, Free Love less so. Part of McKenna’s working method was to make use of recordings made with contact microphones used on objects inside the cabin and also to incorporate field recordings taken on walks on the island into
the tracks. His intention with these location recordings was “to add an organic element to everything I do” (Visitations, 2020b). For example, the first track, recorded on the first day (each numbered track corresponds to the day in the residency it was made), is an 11 minute highly percussive and textural electronic track at 150bpm made largely with a Korg Monologue synthesiser. The programmed drum pattern for this track was played through a speaker in the room in the cabin at high volume and recorded to capture the reverb of the cabin as opposed to directly from the synthesiser (Visitations 2020b). Contact microphones were placed on the cabin’s fireplace brushes and form part of the textural underlay. In this way the bothy was more than a shelter for McKenna but an immersive and critical part of the recording experience.

On the role of the bothy, McKenna states that its role is relational to its position on Eigg:

> When I think of the cabin I kind of see it as a workbench with a beautiful view, but I think more about the island and how that was conducive to creating. Because if the cabin was just in an industrial estate then...it would have been different. (Visitations, 2020b).

This suggests that the islandness of the bothy was a central factor in its sonic inclusion in McKenna’s tracks. McKenna also includes the bothy in Track 2, inspired by lines from the poem ‘One By One’ written by English author Adelaide Anne Procter in 1858:

> One by one the sands are flowing,
> One by one the moments fall;
> Some are coming, some are going;
> Do not strive to grasp them all.

> One by one thy duties wait thee;
> Let thy whole strength go to each;
> Let no future dreams elate thee;
> Learn thou first what these can teach.

The track is in a 7/8-time signature at 175bpm and features an unusual arpeggiated synth bed made using the open-source coding software TidalCycles (Visitations, 2020b). The track features harmonised vocals with notes from a Bb major tonality yet without a strong sense of tonal resolution in the melody or shifting arpeggiated chords. The reference to “sands” in the lyric is reinforced with the inclusion of water and wave sounds at the start and end of the track, recorded with contact microphones on the island. The rippling synthesiser arpeggios also provide a musical element that is analogous to the idea of sands flowing, whilst the name of the software used to create the track plays on the lyric reference as well.

Slow Tree recorded a variety of sounds around Eigg and many of the recording locations of these can be seen in their YouTube video. One of the places they recorded was Cathedral Cave where Aby Fry played the violin and used the caves’ natural echoes to produce reverb. They also considered recording in another location, called Massacre Cave but spoke of how it “did not feel good” and they left quickly (Visitations, 2020b). The cave is reportedly the site of a massacre in the late 1500s of around 400 members of Clan MacDonald at the hands of a rival clan, the MacLeods from the Isle of Skye. The MacDonalde are said to have hid from the rival clan inside the cave due to an ongoing feud. The MacLeods eventually realised where the Eigg-folk were hiding and sealed up the
entrance with heather and thatching before setting it alight, smothering the MacDonalts (Dressler, 1998). After heavy rainfall, storms or disturbance by tourists, bones can still be unearthed today.

Here, Slow Tree’s emotional geographies of Eigg had a large decision on not only what sounds were included in their tracks but also what was excluded due to negative feelings associated with particular places. For the duration of Slow Tree’s residency the weather on Eigg was damp, chilly, overcast, and at times misty. A sense of this darker and foreboding landscape is captured in their first track ‘May All Beings’, set to a slow tempo (106bpm) and a hypnotic 6/4-time signature, the track features bass, acoustic guitar, piano, vocals, bass drum, hi hat and viola, in addition to prominent bird song that was recorded on the island. Harmonically the first half of the track involves a somewhat obscured I - IV - V chord progression (in the key of A major) which moves into a more complex and darker parallel minor (A minor) progression with piano foregrounded and some distant distorted guitar. A repeating, almost monotone melody is heard throughout the track with the lyric “may all beings in this world be well and happy” sung by both Fry and Hamilton. The sombre harmonic and textural elements of the track combined with the jarringly positive lyrics is reflective of the strange and at times discomforting atmosphere on Eigg as a result of its ‘challenging’ climate that is typical of a cold-water island.

In an interview a year after their residency, Slow Tree noted the similarities between the Isle of Eigg and the Isle of Skye, where they have lived for ten years. Whilst they were prepared for the weather, Fry found Eigg, compared to Skye, to “definitely” have “a feeling of being really wild” (Visitations, 2020b). As Hamilton recalled, their approach was to explore the island during the daytime and “see what happened” at night after “filling up on the atmosphere and exploring” (Visitations, 2020c). The process involved “mostly trying to have an experience of Eigg rather than write a song… and being open to the things Eigg does to you… like a weird holiday” (ibid). This quest to “have an experience” is reflected in the lyrics of their track ‘Wild Night’ which features a slow, steady rhythm in a 6/4-time signature underpinning a minor key chord progression played on piano and bass. Hamilton takes the lead vocal role with Fry providing harmonies that are heavily processed with reverb and delay. The lyrics suggest that Eigg is not the typical utopian vision of a warm-water island paradise but there is still beauty to be had within its ruggedness:

\[
\text{Let's go on a journey} \\
\text{To the last island of beauty} \\
\text{But try not to feel disappointed} \\
\text{I know a nice spot, I go there a lot, real beauty spots}
\]

‘Medication’ completes the EP, beginning with a one-minute introduction featuring synthkeyboard sound with delay playing somewhat random note patterns in the key of Eb minor. Like the previous tracks, a slow rhythm bed enters (in 6/4 at 40bpm) made up of metallic, grinding and clock-like noise elements, some created through constant delay effects. A more complex chord progression in the key of F is played on bass, guitar, strings and synthesiser to accompany Hamilton and Fry’s closely blended vocal performance. Overall, the four tracks on the Slow Tree EP have an unpolished feel with loose song structures sitting within rich, and at times murky, soundscape elements that evoke an eerie and mysterious mood, capturing the “wild and vulnerable” feeling Fry felt on the island as well as Hamilton’s notion of a “weird holiday”. There are several ways the word “weird” could be interpreted; it may be that the act of participating in a musical residency

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is a weird act in itself; it could be that it is weird for people who live on one Hebridean island to holiday on another, smaller island close by; it could be the fact that Eigg is a cold-water island and holidaying on a such an island is often regarded as “weirder” than a holiday on a warm-water one, or it could be simply that Slow Tree found their time on Eigg to be weirder than they were expecting. It is possible that this multi-layered experience of weirdness contributed to the overall haunting and nostalgic feeling of Slow Tree's EP.

Slow Tree’s YouTube video demonstrates that water featured prominently in their experience on Eigg; footage includes mist and clouds hanging over the hills, there is frequent drizzle, they pass by waterfalls and stand in caves where drips can be heard in the background. Slow Tree’s experience on Eigg appears to have been a damp one where water featured prominently and possibly contributed to the ‘mirkiness’ of their EP. They also include the sound of waves within their second track, 'Moonlight Lover'. In McKenna’s diary that accompanies the digital release (2019) he mentions field recording with contact microphones at a “babbling brook” which he includes in Track 2. Water and wave sounds are heard most clearly at the end of the track, giving a rich sonic texture.

Free Love, compared with the other two residencies discussed here, used much fewer outdoor sounds. The final track on their EP, 'Returning', begins with water/wave like sounds and a rapid arpeggiated monophonic synth pattern. The arpeggiated synth settles into a steady moderate tempo and layered with a long repeating hummed melody sung by Rodden and doubled on electric bass. There is no mention in the podcast interviews or the diary accompanying the EP that the water/wave like sounds were recorded on the island but it is not unreasonable to assume that this was the case. None of the three acts engaged with the waters surrounding Eigg by submerging microphones along the shore or taking a boat out onto the water. It can be said, therefore, that the Visitations experience is a primarily terrestrially based one where engaging with the aquatic aspect of the island is limited to recordings within the island’s physical boundary.

b. Sonic experimentation with Eigg’s people

For McKenna, the island experience felt very isolating, and yet the occasional human contact during the seven days provided a tension that was a crucial part of the experience, making its way into the lyrics of ‘Track 4’:

Do things ever happen? Or is this all a memory?
Is there such a thing as silence? Are we ever alone?

In his diary, McKenna discusses the song:

I wrote it about my day yesterday and all the lonely/empty moments where I tried to go meet humans. Also the importance of loneliness to keep the heart healthy, to remind us of our desire to be in contact with others. To endure each other to avoid ultimate loneliness. (McKenna’s, diary: p. 8).

By day four (and ‘Track 4’) McKenna started to engage more with his role in the place and society of Eigg; he wanted to write a more conventional guitar and vocal song having spent the first three days creating largely electronic material. As he stated in the interview, he felt he “owed something to the island” and “wanted to make something that would get played there” (2019). The song features a 3/4 time signature and I – vi – II – IV verse and IV
II chorus chord progression in the key of G. With a simple strummed acoustic guitar and vocal, the stripped back texture dramatically contrasts to the other material McKenna produced whilst on the island. The track represents McKenna’s growing awareness of the tensions of the residency programme with regard to stakeholders that stimulates a sense of indebtedness to the community of Eigg and this in turn influences the more accessible and simple nature of his Track 4.

Slow Tree’s song, ‘Moonlight Lover’, opens with a thick drone featuring a mix of vocals, sustained electric guitar, synthesiser and viola with C, G and A pitches prominent. A familiar I – VI – IV – V chord progression (in the key of F) is played on the bass with dark, low pitched viola, synth and guitar drones continuing. The lyric is sung by both Fry and Hamilton, on a simple stepwise diatonic melody harmonised but with very unmatched phrasing, giving it a very ghostly and ethereal quality.

You’re my moonlight lover
When you walk along with me
People say
That our love isn’t true
But to prove that it’s true
I will die for you

These lyrics were recorded after Slow Tree left Eigg, when they returned to the Isle of Skye and they used the voice of a Gaelic-speaking friend. The lyrics are similar to the sentiment expressed in the traditional Scottish Gàidhlig song ’Òganaich An Òr-Fhuilt Bhuidhe’ (‘The Fair-haired Youngsters’ written by Flòraidh NicEacharna from the Isle of Tiree):

’S lèir a’ bhlàth siud air mo ghruaidh-sa,
Gun tug mi dhut gaol nach furaich;
Dh’innis iad gun tug thu fuath dhomh,
Ach cha chreid mi, luaidh, an cainnt.

(It is showing in my cheeks now [possibly referring to pregnancy]
That I have given you a love that will not die
They said you turned your back on me
But I don’t believe their talk.)

The lyrics are keeping with the Hebridean tradition that songs are often about ill-fated or unrequited love. Beyond a casual connection between the lyrics of two songs, the tracks produced through Visitations resemble music that is being produced in the Hebrides. In recent years there has been the development of a contemporary type of ‘traditional’ Hebridean music scene. Folk bands like Peat and Diesel from the Isle of Lewis (formed in 2018) use English lyrics for the majority of their songs that discuss traditional and contemporary aspects of Hebridean living, while other bands like Niteworks from the Isle of Skye (formed in 2008) use electronic instrumentation such as synths alongside traditional Gaelic lyrics and singing techniques such as puirt à beul (mouth music).

Discussion

While Eigg itself acted as a source of inspiration and creative experimentation, particularly for McKenna and Slow Tree, it was the temporal aspect of the residency that seemed to provide the greatest opportunity for the artists. McKenna felt that the residency had a
“huge effect” on his working methods. To be completely cut off and focused on creating music was a contrast to his previous processes. “Before I’ve been trying to cram music into spare hours...something about spending that week there that I really felt the value of saving that energy for a time when you can just dedicate yourself to it... it makes for better music, instead of having any stress” (Visitations, 2020a). The sense of time on Eigg also became a defining part of the creative experience on Eigg for Free Love:

... *kind of takes you back*, in a very non difficult way, to *your human roots* almost, where you are out in the middle of nowhere and darkness is real darkness, it’s not with a faint orange glow, and things like shouting outside ... it really does unlock something that brings contentedness. (ibid, emphasis added).

Experiencing a sense of ‘pastness’ or ‘primevalness’ is common on islands (see MacKinnon and Hannan, 2017) and it can be a very alluring component of islandness as:

*Today it is time as much as space that creates distance. Remoteness, placeness, and pastness have become inseparable. Physical distance and temporal depth reinforce one another.* (Gillis, 2001: p. 39).

Slow Tree also had a psycho-emotional response to being islanded’ “it’s not just about Eigg - it’s about how we were feeling at that time... it’s about what Eigg does to you - and it brings out things that you wouldn’t necessarily expect” (Visitations, 2020c). This echoes how Lowenthal summarises the work of Portuguese author Jose Saramago “islands really own us, for in seeking them we are more often than not in search of ourselves” (2007: p. 202). This perhaps explains Johnny Lynch’s statement about Visitations getting “pretty cosmic”. Free Love give their EP a theme of alien abduction and the track titles (‘Set the Controls’, ‘From Up Here’, ‘Sketches of Earth’ and ‘Returning’) all allude to the alien theme, however only ‘Set the Controls’ has lyrics that reinforce the titles:

*Dimentions of the future in the stars*
*We’ll take you up to cruise in our space car*
*Plastic planet Earth can break your heart*
*Then you’ll go back to reality, back to the start*

Similarly, Slow Tree make reference to the cosmos in their track ‘Wild Night’:

*In the mind you can travel*
*Entire universe*

This suggests that rather than Visitations (and by extension Eigg) turning the attention of musicians inwards towards the island in an insular manner, the combination of time set aside for creativity and the process of production encourages more imaginative and somewhat fantastical modes of thinking that are temporally malleable.

Traditionally, recording studios are physically and emotionally insulated places; the site of relational creative practise between artists, producers and technicians operating at a multitude of spatial scales (Watson, 2014: p. 5). The production of sound during Visitations occurs not just in the studio but in the landscape, and also within the *bothy*; meaning that the geography of the studio is a fuzzy space that extends across the island, into caves and along the shore. The studio has soundproofing to reduce sonic interference.
during recording but it is not a discrete site of production and creation, separate from the island. Instead, it acts as a technological hub for the creative process within a ragged and changing matrix that is contained within the shores of Eigg. The site of the creative process within Visitations is therefore a geographically relational place that involves several hubs of the studio and bothy within a larger creative field of the island. Unlike traditional studios that rely on a team of people to produce tracks, the artists involved in Visitations generally take on these multiple roles themselves. However, this does not mean that the artists are ‘islands’ unto themselves. Visitations is still a relational endeavour. The artists are recruited and interviewed by Johnny Lynch and they are producing content for the Visitations subscribers.

Conclusions

The Visitations residency programme on the Isle of Eigg offers musicians the opportunity to produce new material without creative restrictions and without other demands on their time. Creative experimentation has resulted in genre-ambiguous tracks that are embedded with sounds from the local landscape to differing degrees between artists. The recordings produced often involve both organic sounds from the island overlaid with instrumentation as well as digital production techniques. These soundscapes reproduce and recontextualise the emotional geographies that the musicians experience on Eigg; often giving eerie and haunting qualities to the tracks by using minor keys and/or ambiguous tonal elements, dense textural elements and evocative, universalised themed lyrics. These emotional geographies are in response to the topography of the island, the climate that is representative of a cold-water island and Eigg’s tumultuous past. During their residencies several of the artists were inspired to think cosmically suggesting that an island-based residency does not necessarily produce an insular or geographically specific output.

The creative process frequently extends beyond the walls of the recording studio so that the landscape of Eigg can be thought of as an experimental and dynamic studio. However, this expanded studio space does not extend beyond the edges of Eigg’s shoreline with minimal, if any, interaction between the featured artists and Eigg’s surrounding waters. Therefore, the emotional geographies of the constructed soundscapes can be said to be terrestrially embedded ones. Further, while McKenna felt a sense of obligation to the Eigg community during his residency, recording a track that he thought might appeal to a local audience, the artists featured in this article had minimal engagement with Eiggers. This raises possible issues of social tension and power dynamics of visiting musicians, Eiggers and subscribers to the series. While the EPs are deeply embedded in the landscape they are not so socially embedded within the community or culture of the island. Therefore, it can be said that the Visitations residencies featured in this article interact with different aspects of Eigg to differing degrees, an aspect that could usefully considered when organising future residencies.

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