

MEDIA RELEASE: December 2007

Chris Watson - Whispering in the Leaves



A major new sound installation at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens Presented as part of AV Festival 08 29 February – 9 March 08

Renowned BBC sound recordist and artist Chris Watson creates a major new sound installation that will transport audiences in Sunderland Winter & Gardens in North East England to the extraordinary surroundings of the earth's tropical rainforests. The project is presented as part of the AV Festival 08 which this year explores the theme of broadcast, and is produced by Newcastle based production agency Forma.

Chris Watson is a sound recordist specialising in natural history, with a particular and passionate interest in recording the wildlife sounds of animals, habitats and atmospheres from around the world. Renowned for his award-winning wildlife sound recording work with David Attenborough on productions such as *The Life of Birds* and *The Life of Mammals*, Watson was also a founding member of the electronic music pioneers *Cabaret Voltaire* (1971) and the *Halfer Trio* (1981), and has since released several solo and collaborative experimental music projects on *Touch*.

For AV Festival 08, Watson has created a powerful new sound work derived from his extensive archive of wildlife and on location recordings in Central and South America - habitats that host over half of the planet's wildlife. Diffused through the tropical foliage of the enclosed botanical environment of the Winter Gardens, which is home to over 2,000 flowers and plants, the surround soundtrack of wildlife dawn and dusk choruses will be transmitted at hourly intervals throughout the day for 15-20 minute durations – the approximate time taken in the rainforest for the transitions from darkness into light, and from daylight to dark. The sound pieces feature the calls and voices of thousands of species, including the howls and shrieks of black howler and spider monkeys, the musicality of diverse birdsong and the shimmering and hissing of tree frogs and cicadas.

A highly sensory and captivating experience, *Whispering in the Leaves* is a remarkable demonstration of the power of sound recordings and natural history broadcast to transport us to far flung, inaccessible and often extraordinary locations.

[more>](#)

Live performance, Thursday 6 March, 8.30 – 9pm, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens

Chris Watson performs a live sound mix in which a three or four hour period across late afternoon, sunset and into the night will be compressed into around twenty minutes. Featuring recordings of a tropical thunderstorm and ending with the deep, lush sounds of the nocturnal insect chorus, the performance takes audiences on an intense auditory narrative into the unknown and foreboding territory of the rainforest at night.

Whispering in the Leaves is produced by Forma, and is commissioned by AV Festival and Forma.

AV Festival 08 is organised by Audio Visual Arts North East, an independent charitable company. AV Festival 08 forms part of NewcastleGateshead's world-class festivals and events programme managed by culture10, based at NewcastleGateshead Initiative.

For further press information or images contact Hannah Barnes at Forma on 0207 837 7777/07949 421 977/ hb@forma.org.uk or Nicky Harrison, White Hot Communications (AV Festival) on 0191 280 8020 / 07824 390826 / nicky@whitehotcomms.co.uk

LISTINGS INFORMATION

Venue: Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR1 1PP
Free entry, opening hours: Mon - Sat 10am - 5pm, Sun 2pm - 5pm.
T: 0191 553 2323 / W: www.twmuseums.org.uk/sunderland

Installation: Fri 29 Feb - Sun 9 Mar 08

Live performance: Thurs 6 Mar 08, 8.30 - 9.00pm
FREE but limited capacity to register your interest contact info@avfestival.co.uk

Artists' Talk & Desert Island TV: Sat 8 Mar, 2.30 -3.30pm
Chris Watson discusses his new work Whispering in the Leaves. The talk will be followed by Desert Island TV, where Chris will introduce and screen BBC nature documentary the Life of Birds made with David Attenborough. Free, for bookings contact info@avfestival.co.uk
Websites: www.forma.org.uk / www.avfestival.co.uk / www.twmuseums.org.uk/sunderland

NOTES TO EDITORS

Artist's biography

Chris Watson's work as a wildlife sound recordist includes both work for television documentaries and experimental musical collaborations. In 1971 he was a founding member of the influential Sheffield-based electronic music pioneers Cabaret Voltaire. Watson's sound recording career began in 1981 when he joined Tyne Tees Television. In this year he also became founder member of the experimental music group The Halfer Trio.

He has released three solo albums of field recordings: Outside the Circle of Fire, Stepping into the Dark (which won an Award of Distinction at the 2000 Prix ARS Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria), and Weather Report. He has also released several collaborative projects with other artists, including Star Switch On, a collaboration with Mika Vainio of Pan Sonic, Philip Jeck, Hazard, Fennesz, AER, and Biosphere. He has also released two CDs with Swedish sound artist BJNilsen. All of these recordings were released on Touch.

His work as sound recordist for the BBC includes The Life of Birds for BBC TV - BAFTA Award for Best Factual Sound 1998, The Life of Mammals for BBC TV 2001, and Big Cat Diary for BBC TV 1998-2002. Watson's recordings can be heard on numerous radio productions including A Swallow's Journey for BBC Radio 4 - Sony Radio Award Nominee 2002, The Oak Tree for BBC Radio 4 2006 - featured in BBC Radio's Pick of the Year, and Sounds of the Galapagos for BBC Radio 4 2006.

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In 2006 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Technology degree by the University of the West of England "in recognition of his outstanding contribution to sound recording technology, especially in the field of natural history and documentary location sound".

www.chriswatson.net

Forma Arts and Media Producers

Forma is one of Europe's leading production agencies for high quality, interdisciplinary contemporary art. Collaborating with some of today's most interesting artists, it produces, tours and publishes groundbreaking new projects that seamlessly combine diverse media. Its programme pioneers new hybrid forms of music, visual art, film, new media, dance, theatre and live art.

Forma's international programme encompasses single concerts and large-scale tours for leading performing and visual arts venues and festivals; one-off exhibitions in established visual arts spaces; screenings at film and new media festivals; and major public realm projects that engage with particular places.

Recent projects have included collaborations with artists Antony and the Johnsons, Charles Atlas, Juan Cruz, Graham Dolphin, Christian Fennesz, Doug Fishbone, Carsten Nicolai, Lone Twin, Ryuichi Sakamoto, and Jane and Louise Wilson. The company also exclusively represents the work of Ryoji Ikeda, Lynette Wallworth and Gina Czarnecki to produce and tour their work worldwide.

Forma is supported by Arts Council England
For further information visit www.forma.org.uk

AV Festival 08

AV Festival is the UK's largest international festival of electronic arts, featuring visual art, music and moving image works. AV Festival 08 will run from 28 February - 8 March in venues across Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland, and will address the theme of broadcast through the work of sound artists, musicians, internationally renowned artists and filmmakers from across the globe.

The AV Festival in 2008 will celebrate several key broadcast anniversaries, including:

- the 80th anniversary of the invention of colour television by John Logie Baird (July 3, 1928)
- the 50th Anniversary of the BBC Radiophonics Workshop (1958) & the 10th anniversary of its closure (1998).

AV Festival 08 is supported by Arts Council England, North East, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, ONE NorthEast, Middlesbrough Council, Sunderland City Council, Tyneside Cinema, Northern Film & Media, UK Film Council.

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Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens

Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens combines a museum, art gallery, exhibition space and Winter Gardens to create a stunning visitor attraction in the heart of the city centre.

Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens is owned by Sunderland City Council and managed on its behalf by Tyne & Wear Museums.

Tyne & Wear Museums is England's largest regional museums service running 11 museums and galleries in North East England. Its collections of art, history, archaeology and the natural world are of national importance.

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