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CENTER FOR DOCUMENTARY STUDIES / READING

Audio: The sounds of summer on the day before the solstice

Posted by **Brian Howe** on Mon, Jun 23, 2014 at 1:21 PM

Last Third Friday, June 20, I attended the first **Audio Under the Stars** event at **SPECTRE Arts**, a small gallery near Golden Belt.

In a **preview in the *INDY***, I had described it as “*The Moth*, but prerecorded.” But with ambient sounds and music mixed in, it wound up feeling more like a bite-sized *This American Life*.

Or, perhaps, *This Durham Life*, as the first installment, titled “Sound Solstice,” featured stories at least tangentially connected to summertime in the Bull City.



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photo by Brian Howe

Among a couple of dozen other people, I lounged on a coarsely woven blanket in the gallery's small courtyard, drinking red wine from a plastic cup and eating incredibly sweet creampuffs. The atmosphere was warm in both the literal and social senses; the setting intimate and cozy.

There was a stage, but with no one on it, I chose to recline and look up at the sky. This is what I saw: The strings of lights raked overhead were like a musical staff on creamy blue vellum, gradually deepening into twilight, as airplanes and flocks of birds flew across like scrolling notes.

As I watched, I listened. This is what I heard: There was the one about the tobacco auctioneer and the robot. The one about the reincarnated cat, Dr. Thunder reborn as Tiny Monty. The one about flinging dead kittens into a thicket of briars (listen below) and the one about the man who stole a tree.

Stories bred stories. Afterward, I wandered over to the **Scrap Exchange** to try to catch the end of the **Durham Cinematheque show**, but it was already over. My companion and I were engaged on the street by a neurologist carrying a folding camp chair. He had also just come from SPECTRE Arts. Unprompted, he started telling us about brains.

Brains were saddle-shaped and had four different possible affinities, he said. He had a serotonin-style brain, which made him calm, he said. He had gotten interested in the brain after adopting his daughter from a schizophrenic woman in Kazakhstan who didn't even know she'd had a child, he said.

I believed him, but my brain didn't feel saddle-shaped. It felt like a cool, flat pond—or a deep blue sky, purpling in the twilight—from laying very still in the courtyard and listening to stories, on the night before the solstice, almost dead center in the heart of summer.

The neurologist bounded off into that darkness, which now seemed laden with untold potential, seeming suddenly alert to the notion that he had a few stories to tell himself.

Submit yours here for the next Audio Under the Stars event, themed “Fish Out of Water,” which returns to SPECTRE Arts on July 18.

Listen to "Brambles" by Elizabeth Friend:



3:07

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