

**Dawn Scarfe**

## **Through the Listening Glasses**

**Audio, duration 14:20**

**Recorded in Vienna, May 2010**

This piece explores the act of listening through the ‘lens’ of *Listening Glasses*: hollow, spherical acoustic devices that resonate in response to specific musical tones, should these be present in the air around them.

*Listening Glasses* are models of Helmholtz resonators, tools placed in the ear which enable the listener to identify subtle partial tones in sound. Scientist Herman von Helmholtz (1821-94) used the instruments recreationally, taking them outside of his laboratory and listening for their tones in ‘noises’ such as “the whistling of the wind, the splashing of water [and] the rumbling of carriages.” (Helmholtz, 1954, 44)

The anomalies in Helmholtz’s act raise questions about the purpose of listening. What could be the appeal of identifying particular ‘musical’ tones in the sound of the environment? I made my own set of *Listening Glasses* to explore this notion, taking them outside to try and discover the same sounds that Helmholtz described. These recordings document my search.

