

Dear friend

Thank you for gifting me with your voice.

Siren is the third installment of *Harmony* (now a trilogy), a sound sculpture project I've started in 2015. In the first installment *Harmony*, I reached out to dozens of people from around the globe with a questionnaire-covering subjects including homonyms, government censorship, our connections with strangers, as well as finding common grounds in times of turbulence. More than 60 voices were featured in the first album, which you could listen to at theartcticgroup.org/harmony2017.

This is followed by the 2nd installment *Echo* (2017-2018). It was on the subject of LOSS, and you can listen to all audio tracks at theartcticgroup.org/echo.

This time, we are looking at FEAR. Won't you share your stories with me?

There is no right or wrong way to record your answers. Simply be you! Be goofy, be neutral, laugh when you want to, ad-lib when you need to... if you stumbled on a word / sentence, feel free to take a little pause, and record from the beginning of that same sentence again, and so forth.

I'd encourage you to find somewhere relatively quiet when recording. You can do it alone, or with a partner.

I found that if you record near a fridge, the microphone picks up weird ambient noises that I won't be able to edit out – so, record far from the fridge!

Speaking of the microphone: a smartphone will do. It needn't to be fancy.

If you wish to skip a section, by all means – there is no punishment for this is not an assignment. It should be enjoyable and not make anyone uncomfortable.

You can be as elaborate, or as brief as you like when answering the questions. Your voices will ultimately become a part of a collage, so anonymity is easy to achieve. However, please still only record things you'd be comfortable sharing.

You'll see in the document there are also texts by Homer, Margaret Atwood, among others. There are also texts written by me. I'd love to create a lattice of stories (from you) as well as poetic texts in this piece. So if you aren't opposed to it, please record those sections as well even if you never considered yourself a performer.

Feel free to share the questionnaire with people who you think might enjoy this.

My sincerest gratitude,
Ran Xia
December 2018

SIREN (Part III of the *Harmony*)

Please record all the black texts, which sometimes include titles / questions.

ONE

_____ (Your go-to greeting word), this is _____ (your name), recording from
_____ (city), _____ (State), _____ (Country), _____ (Postal Code)

TWO

When I think of my city/town/country/hometown/neighborhood/home, I can hear the sound of _____. (Trains? Is it the sound of a baker kneading bread? Coffee machine? Mom? Engines? Etc, etc... tell me at least 5 different kinds.)

THREE

Tell me about the birds of your city / hometown. What do they sound like?

FOUR

The sound of _____ used to scare me. But not anymore.
(Tell me about a sound that used to scare you but not anymore.)

FIVE

The sound of _____ still scares me. (And why?)

SIX

To me, the most tempting sound is _____. (And why?)

SEVEN

If the sound of a siren has a color, it's _____. (Perhaps, and why?)

EIGHT

What do the following words mean to you?

Siren
Temptation
Danger
Safety
Fear

NINE (Siren Is...)

1. A loud sound; A prolonged sound
 A loud, prolonged sound
 A signal; A warning
 A signal of warning
 A loud, prolonged, signal of warning
2. Ambulances, police cars,
 Or fire trucks, the alternating "hi-lo" signal – it's familiar
 Signaled when alerting the entire community of impending danger
 Before tornados, earthquakes, eruptions of volcanoes,
 Before the London Blitz
 Before the bombs fell like rain
 Before mothers had time to hide their kids
 Before memories are wiped clean
 ... Used to be a musical instrument
3. *Loll in their flowered meadow, round them heaps of corpses, rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bones. – From Homer's Odyssey. Book 12.*
4. Part woman, part bird, with scaly legs and wings,
 Feathered wings, some say bat wings.
 Some say she's part fish – A cousin of the mermaid, maybe,
 Maybe not
 One thing is for sure -- her voice is alluring, appealing, beguiling, bewitching,
 captivating, charming, enthralling, entrancing, enchanting, fascinating, seductive,
 terrible, dangerous, wicked, awful, treacherous, evil, scary, formidable, deadly –
 Her voice is deadly
 That's what they say
 That's what I was told
 Except
 Nobody lived to tell the tale.
5. The sailor was already heading towards certain death
 There be dragons – She tried to warn him.
 She did!
 But the taste of danger was too delicious – there be dragons
 It wasn't her responsibility to save him
 After all, it's already decided that she's to blame
6. They are aquatic salamanders – Sirenidae – The Sirens
 They have tiny forelimbs, no hind limbs, small eyes, and external gills.
 They typically live in muddy pools.
 They're only found in the Southeastern United States and northern Mexico.

TEN

To me, the scariest monster is _____. (It can be real or fictitious.)
 And they sound like _____.

ELEVEN (From *The Odyssey*, Book 12, "The Sirens' Song")

*Come, Odysseus,
 Stay your ship and listen to our voices.*

*No one has sailed past here until he has heard our honey-sweet song
 Then he sails on, well pleased and richer in knowledge.
 We know the grief of the Greeks and the Trojans
 On the wide plain of Troy – because the gods willed it*

We know all that passes on the generous earth.

TWELVE

A is for ____
B is for ____
C is for ____
D is for ____
E is for ____
F is for ____
G is for ____
H is for ____
I is for ____
J is for ____
K is for ____
L is for ____
M is for ____

N is for ____
O is for ____
P is for ____
Q is for ____
R is for ____
S is for ____
T is for ____
U is for ____
V is for ____
W is for ____
X is for ____
Y is for ____
Z is for ____

THIRTEEN

1. Tell me about a time you heard the sirens, or had a significant experience involving sirens.
2. Tell me about a time you felt truly afraid. What did it sound like then?
3. Is there a particular sound that makes you shudder?
4. Is there a sound that makes you feel safe?
5. What do you feel when you hear a police siren.

6. Tell me about the last time you heard a song from the radio/public space, and it hits you right in the feels that you just have to look it up. What song was it then?
7. What's the last song / piece of music that's stuck in your head? And will you sing a bit from that song please?
8. What's your current ring tone? And why did you make that choice? Same token, what about your alarm clock? Why does it wake you up – or maybe it doesn't?
9. What's the most dreaded/loathed/disturbing sound to you?
10. What is a sexy sound for you? (Some say cats, or trumpets, certain voices, some say the sound of a fan spinning, etc., etc. ... Personally I think violin.)
11. What's the sound of hope?

THIRTEEN

Siren Song, By Margaret Atwood

This is the one song everyone would like to learn:
The song that is irresistible

The song that forces men to leap overboard in squadrons
Even though they see the beached skulls

The song nobody knows because anyone who has heard it is dead, and the others
can't remember

Shall I tell you the secret?
And if I do, will you get me out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here –
Squatting on this island, looking picturesque and mythical with these two feathery
maniacs, I don't enjoy singing this trio, fatal and valuable

I will tell the secret to you
To you, only to you –
Come closer. This song is a cry for help:
Help me!
Only you, only you can –
You are unique

At last, alas, it is a boring song.
But it works every time.

FOURTEEN

From *The Imperfect Paradise*, by Linda Pastan

In ordinary days to come, in Ithaca
 The song of some distant bird,
 The chords of water against the shore, even Penelope
 Humming to herself at the loom
 Would make his head turn, his eyes
 Stray toward the sea.

From *The Desire Manuscripts*, by Edward Hirsch

I listened so the goddess could charm my mind against the ravishing sunlight, the
 lord of noon, and I could stroll through country unharmed, toward the prowling
 straits of Scylla and Charybdis.
 But I was unprepared for the Siren, lolling on a bed in a dirty room above a tavern
 Where workers guzzled sour red wine, and played their cards late into the night.
 It takes only a moment to cruise eternity, who dressed quickly and left, after twenty
 minutes, taking my money.
 I went back to the ship and the ordinary men pressing for home, but, love, some part
 of me has never left that dark green shore sweetened with clover.

FIFTEEN

From "*The Silence of the Sirens*", by Franz Kafka

To protect himself from the Sirens, Ulysses stuffed his ears with wax and bound
 himself to the mast of his ship... But such things were of no help. The song of the
 Sirens could pierce through everything, and the longing of those they seduced would
 have broken far stronger bonds than chains and masts. But Ulysses trusted
 absolutely to his handful of wax and his fathom of chain, and in innocent elation
 over his little stratagem, sailed out to meet the Sirens.

Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence.
 And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that
 someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence
 certainly never. Against the feeling of having triumphed over them by one's own
 strength, and the consequent exaltation that bears down everything before it, no
 earthly powers could have remained intact.

And when Ulysses approached them the potent songstresses actually did not sing,
 whether because they thought that this enemy could be vanquished only by their
 silence, or because of the look of bliss on the face of Ulysses, who was thinking of
 nothing but his wax and his chains, made them forget their singing.

But Ulysses, if one may so express it, did not hear their silence; he thought they were singing and that he alone did not hear them. For a fleeting moment he saw their throats rising and falling, their breasts lifting, their eyes filled with tears, their lips half-parted, but believed that these were accompaniments to the airs which died unheard around him. Soon, however, all this faded from his sight as he fixed his gaze on the distance. The Sirens literally vanished before his resolution.

The Sirens – lovelier than ever – stretched their necks and turned, and let their cold hair flutter free in the wind. They no longer had any desire to allure; all they wanted was to hold, as long as they could, the radiance that fell from Ulysses' great eyes.

If the Sirens had possessed consciousness they would have been annihilated at that moment. But they remained as they had been. All that had happened was that Ulysses had escaped them.

SIXTEEN

Any tinnitus / lingering thoughts?