

## **Under the Flightpath (1981)**

### A Sound Document About Life Near the Airport

The initial recordings for this sound document were made in 1978 for my radio program *Soundwalking* on Vancouver Co-operative Radio. During that time a citizen's group in Vancouver, the Community Forum on Airport Development, had just been successful in slowing down the Ministry of Transport's process towards the expansion of Vancouver International Airport. The plan had been to construct a third runway, one mile nearer to Vancouver. Feasibility studies and environmental impact studies had not been successful in establishing the need for a third runway.

This sound document leads the listener into one residential area of Richmond, a suburb of Vancouver, which is most affected by airplane traffic. It is located directly under the flightpath as the planes approach for landing at and taking off from Vancouver International Airport. I also visited a school located directly under the flightpath and interviewed teachers and children about the experience. Mostly however, I concentrated on one street corner in the neighbourhood which I visited several times between July and Oct. 1978 in order to record different times of day and night as well as the different airplane movements. The noise was considerable as the planes were flying very low across the roof tops of the houses. I stood in the same spot and people from the neighbourhood approached me and asked me what I was doing. They seemed to be used to somebody with equipment, assuming that I was monitoring and measuring the noise from the airplanes.

During my four or five visits I made acquaintance with one resident in particular, an elderly gentleman by the name of Bill. As I was standing across from his house on my first visit he approached me and joined me as I was recording. He continued to join me every time I returned. One time when it was dark, he invited me to stand in his driveway while recording. It was safe there, he said, as safe as standing on the Rock of Gibraltar! He brought me coffee and offered me a chair to sit on. His resonant voice accompanies the listener throughout this piece and welcomes us into his life under the flightpath. He has lived in this neighbourhood for a long time and would never want to move. He loves the community, knows everybody and shows a lot of affection toward the people. For him and his wife to move, would mean to tear out their roots and leave something very precious. The contradictions of living under the flightpath are expressed powerfully in his voice: his love for the neighbourhood on the one hand and his ways of putting up with the airplane noise on the other.

During the 80s - after this piece was created - Vancouver could not resist the forceful trends towards globalization and progress and has been growing rapidly since then into a major urban centre of the Pacific Rim. As a result airport development could no longer be prevented. The third runway was built in the 90s, exactly like it had been planned in the 70s: one mile closer to the city. More neighbourhoods now suffer from airplane noise and in addition have to deal with many more airplanes landing and taking off at Vancouver International Airport.

Under the Flightpath was commissioned by the Hornby Collection, CBC Radio.

Length: 19:00 Minutes