

BENEATH THE FOREST FLOOR (1992)
for two-channel audio

By Hildegard Westerkamp

Beneath the Forest Floor is composed from sounds recorded in old-growth forests on British Columbia's westcoast. It moves us through the visible forest, into its' shadow world, its' spirit; into that which effects our body, heart and mind when we experience forest.

Most of the sounds for this composition were recorded in one specific location, the Carmanah Valley on Vancouver Island. This old-growth rainforest contains some of the tallest known Sitka spruce in the world and cedar trees that are well over one thousand years old. Its' stillness is enormous, punctuated only occasionally by the sounds of small songbirds, ravens and jays, squirrels, flies and mosquitoes. Although the Carmanah Creek is a constant acoustic presence it never disturbs the peace. Its' sound moves in and out of the forest silence as the trail meanders in and out of clearings near the creek. A few days in the Carmanah creates deep inner peace — transmitted, surely, by the trees who have been standing in the same place for hundreds of years.

Beneath the Forest Floor is attempting to provide a space in time for the experience of such peace. Better still, it hopes to encourage listeners to visit a place like the Carmanah, half of which has already been destroyed by clear-cut logging. Aside from experiencing its huge stillness a visit will also transmit a very real knowledge of what is lost if these forests disappear: not only the trees but also an inner space that they transmit to us: a sense of balance and focus, of new energy and life. The inner forest, the forest in us.

Beneath the Forest Floor was commissioned by CBC Radio for Two New Hours and was produced in CBC's Advanced Audio Production Facility in Toronto with the technical assistance of Joanne Anka and Rod Crocker. Thanks to Norbert Ruebsaat for providing his recordings of an adult raven and a young raven from Haida Gwaii. All other recordings were made by myself mostly in the Carmanah Valley on Vancouver Island, as well as in forests near Cowichan Lake on Vancouver Island, on Galiano Island and in Lighthouse Park near Vancouver. All sounds were recorded throughout the summer of 1991. Thanks to Peter Grant for assisting in much of the recording process. Special thanks go to David Jaeger, producer of Two New Hours for making this possible and for giving me the opportunity to work in the above-mentioned first all-digital facility at CBC Radio, Toronto.

Beneath the Forest Floor received a mention at Prix Italia 1994 and was recommended for broadcast by the International Music Council's Rostrum of Electroacoustic Music in 1992. Excerpts of *Beneath the Forest Floor* appear in *Elephant* (2003), a film by Gus van Sant.