

FOUND SOUNDS

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MB = Single para
= Double para

The Museo des Belles Artes in Mexico City is one of the classic examples of architecture of the Art Deco period, lavishly constructed from marble, limestone, copper, ~~and~~ glass, bronze and brass. With a massive interior vestibule topped by a copper dome, ~~off which~~ balconies project from the marble staircase and form the entrances to a series of large rooms. Once the centre of cultural life in the city, the ageing building is pensioned off into providing recital space for visiting foreign virtuosos and ~~for~~ allowing native painters to display their appallingly derivative work. Remarkably, several murals by Rivera and Orozco survive in splendour alongside these ~~the~~ decadent facades. The place is hushed; should someone cough, the sound reverberates with ease around the interior. Suddenly from outside, a flash, and moments later, a crack of thunder. Torrential rain beats on the copper and glass dome in a fusillade of percussion. The doors at the entrance swing and slam as pedestrians rush for shelter. Squeals, shouts and stamping feet ~~fill~~ the base of the building reach up from the base of the building as the tumult continues above.

Museum attendants are observed carrying metal buckets up the stairs to the upper floor. They place them, apparently randomly, around the floor area and retreat in conceited confidence. The fury of the storm soon relents and reduces to a steady downpour. The first drop hits the bottom of a bucket; then the next hits another; then the next, then another, then another, then another, as the rain begins to seep through the glass and copper dome with ~~an increasing~~ ^{accelerating} rapidity. As the noise of the rain begins to recede, the sounds from the ensemble of unattended buckets begins to crescendo, creating complex rhythms as each bucket's respective drip speeds up and slows down according ^{TO THE SIZE OF THE HOLE IN THE ROOF.} Before long the tone and reverberance ~~is~~ emitting from each bucket alters as it fills with water which in turn alters the sound of the recital as it echoes round the building.

The rain gradually dies away and the sun streams through the windows; ~~and~~ sometime later, not long after the last drip has landed, the attendant ~~is~~ REMOVE THE FILLED BUCKETS.

Few large vehicles in Mexico have an adequate silencer; most engines run most of the time at maximum revs; should a driver wish to protest (for any reason), the musical range covered by the warning horns is enormous. The only people who are paid to live with this are the police who, like most custodians in the M Americas, look, and frequently are, extremely aggressive. However, the Mexican police seem to have ~~xxxxxx~~ created an outlet for their frustrations with the help of their regulation issue pea-whistle. By placing the forefinger of the supporting hand over the air vent of the whistle, the shape of the blast can be altered by a few tones. In coordination with breath control and tonguing then this simple tool is, with the many hours of practice a traffic cop is given, a musical instrument with a surprisingly wide range of expression.

The motorists, with their many hours of practice, have come to recognise the various sings/signs that underline or emphasise the precise intention of a particular arm movement or stick swing. Thus as the cop uses ~~xxx~~ his body and one arm to give visual instruction, the other arm and finger and whistle give an audible accompaniment which intones the precision with which the motorist must execute his manoeuvre. The subtleties developed by the whistle players probably escape the ~~rapidly disappearing~~ ^{WHO DISAPPEARS RAPIDLY,} motorist [^] but to the observing pedestrian the mood and improvisational stamina of the player can be studied and appreciated, particularly towards the end of a ten-hour shift - the bare-faced aggression of the piercing, unmovable shriek, clipped at both ends - the amiable warble which flutters to ^{THE} [^] crescendo of [^] respectful nudge ~~it~~ before, having completed its instructional task, departs ~~on~~ off on a path of pure and joyful fantasy, before sinking beneath the ~~xxxxxi~~ accelerator pedals of the next line of waiting traffic.

A suburban section of the city. It is one in the morning and the streets are deserted and quiet but for the continuous and background ~~noise of the city~~ drone ~~from~~ the streets.

The ground trembles. A rumble is detected. An earth tremor? A tidal wave approaching along the street? Nearby tall buildings seem still ~~and~~ intact. The sound from the ground crescendos and then dies like ~~we are leaving to catch a taxi~~ a passing underground train. A few days later [^] pandemonium in the ~~main highway on the next block~~ street outside the house; Car engines being revved madly, horns of varying hues being blasted, people shouting up the queue of stationary vehicles and being shouted back again..... [^] A breakdown tram on ~~the~~ main city thoroughfare a block away has halted all traffic in the vicinity. The police are playing their pea-whistles as they direct, as best they can, the angry ^{EVENING} rush-hour crowd; a breakdown crew are frantically trying to repair an overhead cable. There are no taxis. We wait, and watch. As they attempt to hitch the tram's connector arm back onto the cable, vivid ^{electric-} blue sparks lash back and forth with cutting swishes and cracks. Like a thunderstorm over a battlefield the cacophony is enormous and desperately people rush and scramble to hurry its abate. Finally the line is repaired and the first tram pulls excitedly away. ^{and} Gradually the other trams stacked-up behind, pick up speed and pass by. The ground trembles. The sound of the passing trams is heard through the feet.

A few days later being rushed along a similar highway during the ~~daytime~~ continuous daytime ~~xxxxxxx~~ bustle, ^{The} single-decker buses have automatic gearboxes which have the engines revving almost at maximum for most of the journey and at any one time on these eight-lane city highways these buses almost outnumber the numerous taxis; it seems too that all the brakes are designed to work on the rivets of the brake-shoes. A blind youth feels his way along the aisle of ~~the~~ ^{THE} two pesos (sit-down) bus, as if searching for a seat. He stops abruptly and starts singing in a loud but pleasant baritone voice, ~~frantically~~ a ragged tune to which he beats time ^{to} with his ~~hand~~ -

white-painted aluminium stick on the floor of the bus. Vehicle and passengers career down the highway to the next intersection halt; more passengers get on as he continues with the versified song. Before the next stop is reached he halts as abruptly as he commenced and feeling his way around, makes a coin collection, and then alights. Moments later another blind-man is glimpsed on the street outside ^{an accordion slung round his} ~~his~~ head inclined to the sky, an empty eye-socket echoing the soundless movements of his mouth; by his side an infant is clutching his coat, holding out a tin and gazing up with an open mouth at the people passing-by;

The same ~~xx~~ suburban section of the city. It is one in the morning ~~again~~ and the streets are deserted and quiet but for the continuous background drone from the streets.

A shrill shriek pierces the surrounding residences and gardens of the pleasant bourgeoisie neighbourhood. No one moves.

Again the shriek, this time apparently closer. A child? A terrified woman? The street remains deserted.

At intervals of half a minute ~~every~~ the shriek is heard, sometimes louder than before, sometimes ~~xxxxxxkxkxkxk~~ softer and more distant - it seems to circle inexorably the entire area, sometimes ~~kxx~~ fading from hearing completely. ↗

Over a period of several nights and throughout the darkness hours, this continues.

The shriek approaches again, its urgency and sense of forboding just as insistent as on the first encounter. The low throb of an engine emerges from the background drone and the dipped headlights of a car approach along the street. A large, late '50's American model in gleaming condition emerges from the gloom, the driver's arm resting on the retracted window as he guides ~~the~~ the car precisely along the centre of the road. His companion leans out of the ~~xx~~ other retracted window. In his mouth he holds a cops pea-whistle. As they pass, the player forms his cheeks into a balloon and let goes a piercing blast.