

# Noema

Source material recorded July to October 2012 in Kyoto.

Pieces composed January 2013 to March 2014 in Zürich.

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Editons 003 <http://jasonkahn.net/editions>

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## Side A

### 1. Warning Tone

Warning tones at Kitaoji subway station rising up from a broad stairway, tiled and white. Mira and I stood in the fluorescent light. Our skin looked sickly green. This took a long time. The warning tones swirled around us, sometimes it seemed from the street outside. It was late but Kita-Oji Dori still roared with traffic. Buses pulled into the depot.

### 2. Temple Dance

Another night walking down Senbon Dori. Injo-ji Temple lit up, music reaches the street. Inside people dance, the neighborhood teams. Matching uniforms, matching steps. Wow! Music canned but the drummer had some. An older man with hair like Elvis. Watching his moves I thought of Peter Hollinger long ago (what ever happened to him?). Inside the main temple, the cosmic glockenspiel played.

### 3. Checkout

At the end of Kita-oji Dori, far into the east. Nowheresville. Took a right into Shirakawa Dori. This supermarket, one of many. This man screaming, one of many. Things on sale, aisles to stock. Carts swing on by, the bearings in those wheels need some oil. Cash register blare. A-beeping, a-clicking. Cash drawer rips open, bangs shut. I bought a bottle of water. The music was great.

### 4. Haunted House

Yoshida Higashi Dori comes alive at night. On the way we found a squatted university building. A total slacker scene. But they directed us to the street festival, where we found stages and stalls and food and a marching band going up and down Yoshida Higashi Dori. Takuji told us about this. I went in a haunted house with Josefine. She wasn't scared. I crawled on

my stomach like a bug. This was not meant for adults, but nobody told me. Back outside Takuji whizzed by on his skateboard. It seemed like everyone was drunk.

### 5. Winds Away

Monsoon day, ripping awnings hanging on desperately to their place in the wind and rain. Waiting for a bus, gray sky heavy on the horizon. Just up the street from Daitoku-ji. I took my place under the flapping canvas that whipped and bucked. The rain felt good. Several buses came and went. In the end, I decided to walk home.

### 6. Sporting

Taking tennis seriously, lots of grunts, maybe threats? Six courts full, just young kids. But intense. It was Sunday and I heard the music from Murasakino Elementary School. A lady motioned for me to come inside. More kids speeding around the track. Go go go! Insane march music, polkas and ragtime played super loud and distorted in the background. I dug the music.

### 8. Musician

Searching for Shin's "secret listening place" (was not so great, after all...). The park surrounding Shimogamo Shrine buzzing like a million oscillators in a thick canopy of trees above. I felt the suzumushi raining down on me, gravel and twig crunched underfoot. Someone played a horn, not sure if bad or good but I liked it just the same. My head cleared. When the music was over, someone had a good laugh with their friends.

### 9. 100 Yen

Senbon Dori 100 yen shop. How many times did I stop here? Always the best sounds. I never bought anything, just stood there listening, wandering down the aisles. They always had a cassette player going off in the corner. A woman's voice shrieked wildly. A sale going on, every day a sale going on in the 100 yen shop. What could be cheaper than 100 yen?

### 10. Shopping Arcade

The music, this time enka. A glass roof covers this shopping arcade and the songs bounce from floor to ceiling. It's closing time, people sweeping up, packing away the stalls. Later, I spent an hour watching red beans cakes being made by a glistening silver machine. For each cake a chime rang. And outside behind us there was a shrine. More music played here (in a shrine?) and people came and went, ringing the shrine's bell.

## Side B

### 1. Kids

Kids playing with sticks in a nursery school just around the corner from my guesthouse next to Daitoku-ji graveyard. Parents picking them up at the end of a long day. Everyone running around and screaming like crazy! Later at Kyoto University to record musicians practicing in the courtyard. Heard loud thumping sounds from a small window tucked in the ground behind me. Looked inside, saw basement gymnasium in yellow light. A judo class in full swing. I placed the microphones in the window and enjoyed the musicians.

### 2. Outside Karaoke

Kyoto at night. Walking down the Kurama-guchi Dori towards my guesthouse. I came past a small bar, music so loud inside, blaring into the darkness. A jet plane passed overhead, distant sirens. I love this song, second to the 100 yen shop. Hearing this I didn't need to go inside, could just imagine the scene. It was perfect. A bit later two people talking quietly from a balcony above, suzumushi caustic in the background. My ears ringing.

### 3. Hara

Jakob fascinated by two gardeners digging holes to plant trees. A plague of gift shops lined the creek nearby, some swinging music playing from one. I entered a store, tested a bunch of bells (for what?). People drifting in and out, cash registers ringing. Rush of the Kamogawa down the hill. White water, white noise. A day's outing. The bus stop soba wasn't so good but we were glad for it anyways.

### 4. Kyoto Station

The lost chord and "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head" in ubiquitous bakery, trying to duck the rain of "sumimasen's." Sunday afternoon at Kyoto main train station, nowhere to move. People everywhere. A big band plays, where did that come from? The hall fills with music, many stories up. Precision and velocity. Massive brass section. We all melt in the summer heat, waiting for our trains.

### 5. Big Ship

Funaokayama Park, "The Big Ship," set asail above Kyoto. My last night in the city, climbed to the top, carpet of light below spreading into darkness. Mostly just roar of traffic, vicious motorcycles. Summer gone, still a few brave and persistent suzumushi remain. I set up the

microphones, let it roll. Ansel Adams. This title not taken from Brian Eno but the shape of the park. I never visited the shrine there, though I walked past it many times.

### 6. Parlor

Smell of of nicotine, sweat, synthetic sweetener, metal. Silver balls piling up, box on box. Some with nothing. All over Kyoto, spend the whole day, the world outside withering away. How many did I record? The density intrigued me, no one ever chased me away. One time I tried to bring Josefine in with me but they said "no," with hands crossed. No kids in the pachinko parlor. No way. I guess she was better for it.

### 7. For Alms

Jakob wanted to know if I wasn't scared of the monks. They came back in a line, chanting, half running through the portal back to Ryushoji Temple, where they lived. Spent the morning begging in the city. Did they bring anything home? We couldn't ask. Seems like something they just have to do. Across the way from Ryushoji a dense grove of bamboo rustled in the wind. This is what I remember most from the day. Jakob went to chase some temple cats.

### 8. Fire Warning

Imagined a rain of nunchuk's splintering the hot summer night. But then slowed it all down. Laying in bed I heard these voices. I ran outside. People holding lanterns, hitting sticks together. "Danger, fire." Spontaneous combustion, sizzling in the air. Mostly old people but a few young ones too. They kept Kitaoji safe. "O-tsukaresama desu..." I went back to bed and dreamed of fire.

### 9. Flea Market

Kitano Tenmangu Shrine inside, Tenjin-san flea market outside. Hottest day of the summer, white shirt students surge into the shrine, pulling that bell like crazy. Hope for better grades, success in this life. I hear a huge cricket in my head buzzing through the heat. I crouch in the shade as Magali chats with some French tourists. It's closing time, people packing up. The stalls disappear. We go off to find something to eat.

### 10. Ghost Pond

Takuji told me Midorogaike pond was haunted. He walked home from Yugue one night and said afterwards that he saw a ghost there. I went in the daytime, just to be sure. It still felt haunted. I had to ask several people the way there. A trail surrounded the lake. I found a (mental?)

hospital there. At each stop I cast my microphone in the water, which made me think of fishing when I was a kid. I caught some sound, an eerie vibration. Green strands of algae floated in the water.

## Side C

### 1. Sender

I have my radio out, scanning the airwaves. Everyone is sleeping. I'm huddled up against the desk with headphones on. Warm air pours in through the open window. Everything sounds terrific, just move the dial the slightest bit and something new. I could sit here forever but tomorrow is another day. Gaijin legs hurt, not used to sitting like this. I go to bed, dream of these frequencies, stray voices.

### 2. Summer Phase

There they are, two on the tree. Heard but never seen, suzumushi. Big as life. I move in with the recorder. They have no fear. I stand right over them. They don't move, just buzz, do what they do. Such a beautiful sound. Maria stands nearby. I shoo her away. We might never have this chance again. A brook running from Kamigamo Shrine gurgles behind us, kids playing. The suzumushi stop. Maria and I head back to the cool water and soak our feet.

### 3. Shopping

Department store in the Kita-Oji Dori, by the right fork of the Kamogawa. I go inside because I know it will be cool. I get a cup of coffee from people in white lab coats working decanters, meters of glass tubes. A steady drip. I drift from floor to floor, music, so much music. Kids cluster around video games, wild sounds. I wonder what it must be like to come here day after day. No choice but to return to the heat.

### 4. Kamogawa

We go here most everyday to escape the heat, get wet. We found a bridge where the water doesn't run too deep or too fast beneath. Here the kids can play. One day around dusk, we saw two men and a woman having dinner in the river, their table and chairs set in the water. They drank wine from a cooler. Nearby, skaters set up ramps and did flips. We head off later to a Lawson and get some ice cream for everyone.

### 5. Temple Ground

Some of my favorite temples. Shokoku-ji, where the priest chanting absolutely

terrified me the first time I heard him. Afterwards, he struck his sticks several times so slowly, so beautifully, over and over. It seemed to go on forever. Enryaku-ji, atop Mount Hiei. The Magic Mountain. Inside the main hall it smelled so fine, everything muffled sounding, cool in the shadows. Down in the darkness strange shapes, burning incense. Now and then a monk would appear. Even the kids were quiet here.

### 6. Daybreak

In the early morning you can hear them chanting, playing drums and ringing bells. I managed to track them down, it sounded like they were in Juko-In. The city was coming to life, roosters calling, noisy two-stroke motor bikes and delivery vehicles snarling through the cool morning air. Got the microphones up, standing there taking it all in. I forget about the recording. An old woman jogs by with her dog. The bell behind Daitoku-ji rings out. I stop the recorder and head back to Tani House.

### 7. Footstep

Walking along the canal on the way to Honen-in. Voices and (always) crickets. How much walking did we do in Kyoto, from place to place? The heat's tension like an immense weight. The day breaks apart, bits of the city falling behind us. In the cool shadows of Honen-in. The temple was closed but we spent some time sitting on the steps. Pine trees swayed outside.

### 8. Enryaku-ji

A short wait before the train took us up the slopes of Mount Hiei to Enryaku-ji. Someone practicing the drums back behind on a ledge overlooking the parking lot. One thousand years ago the visitor bell rang. Still today. I take my turn. Wow! The whole valley fills with this sound. Inside Enryaku-ji it's quiet and dark and cool. People shuffle around in stocking feet. The train crawls back down the mountain, we're on our way home. I can still hear that visitor bell.

### 9. Little Shrine

Little shrine has a bell and a drum. Music plays itself in the shade of Shishen-do above, where the others still are. First I hear the sirens, then Alice crying. The drum holds up well in the heat and humidity, better than me. The bell cuts like a knife. I thought I heard a big band practicing down the hill. When the wind is just right I can just barely hear them. Here come the others, time to make our way back down the hill to Manijuin Dori.

## Side D

### 1. Shimogama

Back again at Shimogama and caught in a lecture hall. This sea of voices welling up around me. Go back outside, bell cricket, trees shivering in the warm breeze. Why does everything sound so great here? Gravel underfoot, crisp leaves. A lot of books for sale, but nothing in English. And at night this is one dark place but not spooky. Mysterious. Someone clicking sticks off in the shadows. With the running brook a little symphony.

### 2. Rains

I try to pick out the sound of each drop on my umbrella. Arrived early to hear Gagaku concert on the shrine grounds but the rain stopped that. Woman at the ticket counter with arms crossed, head nodding. OK, I get it. But I'm gonna stand here in the rain anyways. I didn't come all this way for nothing. And then I find a corrugated tin roof to take shelter under and man does it really get loud. So, this was the concert I came for. After the batteries ran out in my recorder I went to get some soba.

### 3. Underground

Sometimes we'd take the subway just to escape the heat. The buses were air conditioned, it's true, but often we couldn't get Alice's stroller inside for all the people. In Kyoto everything feels like it's running in slow motion. Coming back from Tokyo once I had to laugh when I arrived at Kitaoji station, with it's green tile and plastic plants. The chipboard figure of a smiling subway employee showing the way. Where are all the crowds? I still had to catch a bus home the rest of the way. But it was now dark outside, the last late night workers slowly making their way home.

### 4. Above

We took the steps up above Kamigamo Shrine. We had a good view of the city sprawling out to the east. Jakob had the bejeezus scared out of him. Thought he heard a monkey in the trees behind us. Magali had to take him back down the hill. I stayed up on top a while. A few people came by, rang the bell, clapped their hands. This little shrine here, a bit dusty but nice that way. Don't always want to feel like I'm in a museum. So many dogs barking down below. Maybe they hear monkeys too.

### 5. Coffee Shop

The sound of America. Eight tatami mat room, full of people. We have a concert

tonight. Dai is a great host. He makes his own bagels. A family used to live here in this room. A father, a mother and two kids. In this one room. And downstairs they ran their store. At the tip of two rivers passing to one. Well, I drank too much this night. It was a cool time. I don't usually get the chance to play in my socks.

### 6. Announcement

I didn't know what this man was saying, but he was persistent. Up and down each and every street in my neighborhood. I never saw anyone approach his little truck. I never saw him get out. I kept hearing these announcements, different messages. Always the little truck. One day at the corner of Horikawa Dori and Kitayama Dori the communists were campaigning. Voices ricocheted from one corner of the intersection to the other. A woman in a white sun visor handed me a flier.

### 7. Night Out

First night out, alone. Down by the Kamogawa with drum sticks, can of beer and Durabase cassette recorder. Mosquitos are having a field day. I get back on the bike and throw the Durabase in the front metal basket, recording the whole way. I ride through the dark. Joggers graze by. I find an all-night restaurant and order some udon. It's late but still lots of customers. So, this is Kyoto.

### 8. Sword Fight

Mira and I left the Sakamoto station and made our way to the cable car. Heard some kids shouting from a school nearby. They were having a real workout, screaming and hollering. And sticks clacking together. A man said to us, "Kendo." I stood outside that schoolhouse a good long time. Sitting in the cable car all the way up to Enryaku-ji I could still hear those kids in my head.

### 9. Casting Wish

Another coin in the cup, chain rattling. Years of dust here but it seems some people still come by. Rhythmic pulse of the city below. A light fog, yellow lights seep through. The end of summer and a steady wind, cool from the east. Everyone's gone home now. I have one last visit here and then soon I'll be gone too. I throw one hundred yen in the cup, pull the bell and clap. This was my wish.