

Below the Hearing Threshold

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Synopsis

In the radiophonic work *Below the Hearing Threshold* (Djupare under hörtröskeln) we hear a radio show about marginal music, whatever that is. Composers present their fictitious works and quarrel about who composed the pieces as the dialogue dissolves into complicated language games with far too many rules.

An earlier version of *Below the Hearing Threshold* was presented at the Ultima festival in 2007. However, large parts of the dialogue that were recorded for the occasion had to be omitted from the concert version, and some parts of the manuscript hadn't even been recorded. It wasn't until 2020, with a commission from Notam and funding from the Norwegian Cultural Council, that a new version was realised, this time featuring four new characters and lots of newly written and recorded material.

The new version was premiered at the Ultima festival in 2020 as an installation with a print exhibition in a shed outside of Deichman's library in Grünerløkka, Oslo. The radio play was also broadcast on RadiOrakel as a seven episode mini series during the autumn of 2020, and on Radio Tenthaus in 2021.

PART 1

A prologue introduces Wittgenstein's observation that everyone has a box with a "beetle" inside it. It's just that we can't look into another person's box, and everyone says they know what a beetle is like by looking into their own box.

Then we find ourselves in the studio at the premiere of the program *Below the Hearing Threshold*. The show host didn't quite expect her husband to be there, but decides to interview him about his latest piece anyway. So he goes on an inspired rant about a piece for saxophone quartet and live electronics where the musicians are shrunk to the size of an ant; they travel to China in a match box in eleven seconds. As they are about to listen to *The Pitch Shifter's Nightmare*, the composer Hagerup wakes up underneath the studio table. He tries to tell the radio host that *he* composed the piece.

Still in the studio, Hagerup has brought a new work to be played on the radio. – "No, we can't put *that* on the air!" says the program host, "what do you think our listeners would say?"

Ringling church bells and a folk music choral announce the beginning of the next section. Hagerup finds himself in front of an amused audience who mocks him as he tries to read his poem.

Then the first radio show host and Hagerup have an extended quarrel; she accuses him of not saying anything, to which Hagerup replies: I've never said that. We hear Hagerup in an introverted monologue. He mumbles incoherently about lights that you swallow and street lights that turn themselves off when it gets dark.

In the final section we are again in the radio studio. This time Hagerup talks about his piece for airplane and musicians. The musicians are shrunk to the size of ants, and the trip to China takes eleven seconds, or was it eleven minutes? Hagerup tells the show host that he is inspired by Beethoven, but she is not sure if the listeners know who Beethoven is.

During the piece we hear Mantissa reading a Wittgenstein quote about airplanes. The episode ends with the recurring theme song played on hawaii guitar.

PART 2

Hagerup tries to instruct the radio show host how to sniff some kind of powder. A dialogue involving most of the characters ensues, with the recurring question: "Did your psychologist tell you that?"

The ever paranoid Hagerup enters into a dialogue with himself; he talks to himself seated inside a wardrobe while simultaneously standing on the outside.

Then Hagerup visits his psychologist for an hypnosis session. The psychologist soothingly instructs Hagerup to relax. He tells him that all his friends will deceive him and that he will feel miserable from now on. Hagerup wakes up in a train, not remembering anything.

After a brief interlude of cut-up dialogue involving most of the characters, the radio show host asks Hagerup what he is working on. "A synthetic swan," he replies, continuing with an elaborate surreal description. Incredulously, the radio show host begins to question Hagerup about various employments he might consider. He answers most reluctantly as buzzing flies overtake their dialogue.

PART 3

In the opening scene, a new radio show host receives the composer Vinyl for a work interview and asks her about her job qualifications. Vinyl optimistically responds that she is able to do anything.

The radio show host remarks that Vinyl began composing as a four-years-old. They have dug up her first composition and will play it on the radio – despite Vinyl's protests. They also play another one of Vinyl's compositions, called *Hagerup Asleep in Front of His TV*.

In the next scene Hagerup asks the first radio show host why she didn't call. She says that her husband deliberately forgot to pay the phone bills so that they wouldn't be able to talk, which her husband promptly rejects.

Then follows an interview with both radio show hosts and Vinyl, who tries to be anonymous by speaking backwards.

After that we hear a passage from Beethoven's Arch Duke piano trio (in a modified version, titled *The Arch Idiot*). Meanwhile the narrator reads a text about chamber music. The scene morphs into fireworks and more confused dialogue.

Vinyl is back in the studio with the new host, this time speaking normally, albeit hesitating and frequently losing track. Mantissa, hiding in the back of the studio, exclaims that she actually wrote the piece that Vinyl is being interviewed about. Canned laughter underscore the ridiculousness of Vinyl's pretentious answers.

PART 4

We find ourselves on a farm in some rural part of Norway. A folk music tune is played on saxophone *à la tromba* and then on harding fiddle. The radio show host talks with Hagerup who tried to turn his life into a work of art, only to discover that he was hungry and nobody understood him; then she has exactly the same dialogue with her husband.

The narrator speaks about a psychopath who has sliced his childhood friends to pieces. Then Hagerup and the first show host's husband engage in a quarrel that ends with a fight.

Next, the radio show host wants Hagerup to talk about one of his dreams. Overlayered with another dialogue, Hagerup recalls flying to China.

In the final section Mantissa is the guest in the studio with the new show host. She is asked about how she composes her saxophone quartets with live-electronics. And what is she doing with the tax payer's money, anyway? Finally, as the host mentions Beethoven, Mantissa goes into a long rant about his mediocrity, actually misquoting Wittgenstein who has a similar rant about Gustav Mahler. The monologue fades into a long minimalist piece.