

**Listening Through the Light:
A Posthumanist Ecofeminist Interpretation of *Bioluminescent Baby* (2019)**
Alison Maggart

In the “Firefly Suite” of *Bioluminescent Baby*, when entomologist Lynn Faust explains the phenomenon of synchronicity, her Appalachian accent reminds me of home. Forwarding an ecological listening practice that blurs visibility and aurality, she describes how the Tennessean fireflies’ perennial reproductive blink, a sophisticated rhythm of light and darkness, creates a space of listening “through the light.” “*We are all connected,*” she says, “*and if their little lights go out, we may be next.*”

Bioluminescent Baby – one installment of *In the Company of Insects*, a new media collaboration by poet Fiona Benson and sound artists Mair Bosworth and Eliza Lomas – is an intimate assemblage of expert interviews, poetry, field recordings, and musical composition that explores existential questions of life, reproduction, and survival, transspecies communication, and ecological responsibility. In this paper, I offer an interpretation of *Bioluminescent Baby* that combines literary theory, critical ecology and ecofeminism, voice and sound studies. I discuss how the figurations of music and motherhood connect its fourteen movements – each dedicated to an insect’s erotic song and maternal nature (field crickets’ trilling, caring cockroach’s purrs, magicicadas’ ecstatic chirps). Then, aided by spectral analysis, I listen attentively to the “Firefly Suite.” I dissect the musicality of Benson’s poetry (its metrical regularities and irregularities, internal rhymes, assonances, and alliterations) and the sensuous materiality of her voice (the paralinguistics of her lilting and rhythmic canter, the phonological parallelisms that shape salient melodies).

This enchanting lyric (underscored by guitar and responsive to the entomological interviews and field recordings it accompanies) illuminates the ethical imperatives of the interspecies interactions voiced in the scientists’ everyday language. Furthermore, because music both discursively (as subject) and materially (as voice) traverses *Bioluminescent Baby*’s formal sections, Benson also coaxes us to listen for correspondences across multiple other boundaries and dichotomies that are composed in the work: across the generational divides of mother and child and the geographic divides of place; between humans and more-than-humans, scientific discourse and poetry, soundscape and music, looking and listening. Ultimately, inviting a listening practice that attends to the trans-corporeal and entangled nature of being, *Bioluminescent Baby* forwards an ecofeminist and posthumanist ethics.

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Alison Maggart (PhD) is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in Musicology at The University of Texas at Austin. My research centers on music, language, and US modernist identity (in particular, American Jewish identity). My work on Milton Babbitt has been published in *Contemporary Music Review* (2021), *Perspectives of New Music* (2020), and *Current Musicology* (2017). My most recent project, “The Literary Echoes in Milton Babbitt’s Music,” will appear *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Fall 2023). In this article, I examine Babbitt’s songs in relation to his

“misreadings” of Schenkerian analysis, generative-transformational linguistics, and midcentury literary theory on phonology, ambiguity, and intertextuality. Additional research interests include technoscientific imaginaries, utopianism, and esotericism in ultramodern, serial, and New Age aesthetics; the appropriation of language from quantum physics and Eastern spiritual philosophies in popular theories of sound/vibration; voice studies (Echo); feminist and environmental activism in song, opera, sound poetry, and soundscape composition.