

Underground hydromusicology: Subjective interpretations of groundwater-inspired electronic music

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Article impact statement: This article examines how groundwater-inspired electronic music supports science communication and environmental awareness.

Music has long drawn inspiration from many sources, including nature, yet groundwater, despite its fundamental importance and interpretative potential, is rarely represented in music and is commonly overshadowed by other environmental narratives. The connection between groundwater and music is notably highlighted by groundwater hydrologist Dr. Kevin Befus who published two Water Underground blog posts in 2014 and 2017, entitled "Best groundwater song ever? 'Once in a Lifetime' by the Talking Heads?" (<https://blogs.egu.eu/network/water-underground/2014/04/19/best-groundwater-song-ever-once-in-a-lifetime-by-the-talking-heads/>) and "Musical groundwater?" (<https://blogs.egu.eu/network/water-underground/2017/04/12/musical-groundwater/>) respectively. Additionally, music

inspired by groundwater and other components of the hydrological cycle has been examined by Ribeiro (2021), while karst groundwater in Ireland has provided inspiration for choral composition, film, and multimedia events combining sculptures, visual projections, and spoken word (Vucinic and Coxon, 2023). Within this broader context, this contribution examines groundwater-inspired electronic music, with a particular focus on Overcast Sound's "Into the Groundwater" album (<https://odrexmusic.bandcamp.com/album/into-the-groundwater>), although there are other electronic music works titled "Groundwater" or "Ground Water", such as Hostox's (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfFL7sQ_5y8), illAx's (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Zqc80qjUdw>), American DJ's (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zA-r-bKuvAw>), and Drainpuppet's (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIKI_ZFp6pg) tracks.

Of particular significance is Overcast Sound's album which comprises eight tracks and uses a combination of field recordings and Dub, Deep, and Chill Techno sounds to depict the musical journey of groundwater. In recognition of precipitation's centrality in the recharge of groundwater systems, the album's opening track entitled "When will the Rains Stop" sets the stage using ambient sounds of heavy rain in combination with predominantly Chill and Deep Techno musical elements. The album proceeds to feature an "Effluence" track which owing to its deep and chill rhythmic patterns and ambient sounds, captures the essence of water movement in subsurface and embodies the flow and persistent nature of groundwater. Other features in the album include the track entitled "Leaching" wherein a turn is taken towards more intensified Dub and Deep Techno melodies which have parallels with the kinetic mechanisms involved in groundwater transportation of soluble substances and particles through soils and rocks beneath. And the first half of the album culminates in "Somewhere

Underwater”, an ethereal soundscape of a track that is punctuated by water movement sounds that create a sense of being submerged as would be the experience of groundwater flooding. In the second half of the album, Overcast Sound features the dual tracks entitled “Lost at Sea” and “Sea Side” which explore the interplay between groundwater and surface water (such as submarine groundwater discharge, groundwater-surface water interactions, etc.) and blend these deep resonant beats with a range of relevant ambient sounds. These are followed by the penultimate track entitled “Murky Water” which incorporates more pronounced percussion and Chill Techno sound elements and appears to address the issue of groundwater pollution using darker and more complex tones which are symbolic of contamination and the water quality challenges. And the album concludes with the track entitled “Lament for the Rivers”, a poignantly sombre yet rhythmic Techno requiem that can be perceived as a mourning of the diminished flow of groundwater-fed rivers that is steeped in the sense of loss and urgency that accompanies climate-changed induced water crises such as droughts.

Overall, Overcast Sound’s album skilfully intersects multiple techno sub-genres with groundwater processes, demonstrating a level of musical and conceptual coherence that distinguishes it from other groundwater-inspired electronic tracks. While individual compositions by various electronic music artists evoke aspects of groundwater through isolated soundscapes or themes, “Into the Groundwater” stands apart as a complete album-length exploration that engages with groundwater systems in greater depth, continuity, and understanding. More broadly, this article illustrates how artistic practices such as electronic music can function as an interpretative and communicative bridge between scientific understanding and the environment. By translating groundwater processes that are often hidden or difficult to observe into

72 sound and accessible cultural narratives, music offers an alternative way of engaging
73 audiences with hydrogeology and its wider implications. In this sense, groundwater-
74 inspired music does not merely reflect scientific concepts but contributes to
75 environmental awareness through emotional, sensory, and cultural connections.

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