

Still Life is a series of recordings created as a response to the extreme pace of modern life. Acoustic instruments both modern and ancient, household/found objects and environmental sounds are seamlessly blended together using modern recording techniques into extended pieces which gradually reveal themselves over time. The intent is to create panoramic aural landscapes that blur the line between natural and man-made, providing the listener with a unique sonic space in which to dream or simply float.

Creators Nelson Foltz and Tom Lynn have been collaborating for nearly twenty years since they first met while studying music in college. Their combined credits include work with such diverse artists as Steely Dan, Barry White, Kenny Werner, Aretha Franklin, Dave Liebman, Roberta Flack, Manhattan Transfer and Tony Williams. Numerous innovative artists including Laurie Anderson, Jon Hassell, Pauline Oliveros, Emil Schult of Kraftwerk and Maria Schneider have endorsed music from the Still Life series.

With Still Life, Tom and Nelson's goal is to remove the demands of their individual egos and allow the music to develop organically. The music is created without any agenda or specific plan. Citing the influence of musical innovators such as Jon Hassell, Gil Evans and Sheila Chandra as well as the conceptual work of artists Andrew Goldsworthy, Frank Gehry and Paul Klee, Foltz and Lynn draw inspiration from their everyday sonic environment and expand upon it by utilizing exclusively acoustic sources.

Each volume of the series is designed to stand alone, but certain stylistic elements unify the body of work. Influences as varied as West African drumming, American minimalist music, sacred devotional music, ancient drones and tuning systems all combine into a coherent whole. The use of tibetan temple bowls, armenian doudouk, trombone, and bass clarinet alongside a half-filled bath tub, poster tubes, wine glasses, and the sounds of children playing weaves a unique and hypnotic sonic tapestry.

Although only the most common studio tools are used to record and shape the sounds, the recording process is an integral part of the music, creating sometimes dense multi-layered textures through the use of a "potter's wheel" approach. Repetition is a key element in the musical fabric as are the use of improvisation and a willingness to embrace randomness. Varying the length of repeated phrases ensures that the interaction of the parts is constantly changing as the piece evolves. New layers are then improvised in response to the ever-developing textures. "This allows us to constantly react to the music as it is being recorded and not get stuck trying to realize a prefabricated plan. We don't go in knowing how a piece will sound, and [we] try to maintain a sort of 'through a child's eyes' perspective throughout the process. The importance of spontaneity probably comes from the training and experience we both have playing jazz," Nelson commented.

Since it utilizes instruments from India, Africa, Tibet, and Eastern Europe, it is tempting to label the Still Life series as world music. A more apt term might be 'earth music.' As Tom explains, "World music is from the point of view of a particular cultural tradition. Our music is more like looking at Earth from space. The history and geography are all there, but blended together and passed through a filter of subtlety, as if seen from a distance. There is a profound beauty that emerges when things are viewed with a wider lens. We just do our best to try and capture that beauty in musical form."

## **February 2008**

Still Life - volume three was chosen to be among the top ten ambient recordings of 2007 by reviewer Bill Binkelman of the New Age Reporter.

Reviewer Darren Bergstein also included the Still Life series in his list of the top 10 recordings of 2007 for the online music magazine Perfect Sound Forever.

## **September 2007**

Composer/musicians Nelson Foltz and Tom Lynn announce the release of their latest recording on the independent Stillsounds label.

'Still Life - volume three' is the fourth installment in the Still Life series which began in 2004. It follows volume one, Interlude and volume two in an attempt to create unobtrusive music that is organic in character as well as origin. Influenced as much by musical innovators such as Jon Hassell, Gil Evans and Sheila Chandra as by the conceptual work of artists Andrew Goldsworthy, Frank Gehry and Paul Klee, Foltz and Lynn draw inspiration from their everyday sonic environment and expand upon it with the use of non-electronic instruments both household/found and traditional. Their desire is to create soundscapes that blur the line between natural and man-made.

The opening of volume three emerges from an almost vaporous state and slowly congeals into a glistening watery atmosphere. A subtle heartbeat pulse appears amidst this texture with layers of accompaniment being added over time, allowing for exploration into the meditative aspects of rhythmic entrainment. The piece transitions gradually into an environment intentionally designed to create the sensation of levitation, eventually resolving into a panoramic aural landscape where the listener can simply float.

The emphasis is on subtlety and multi-layered textures that gently develop over time while maintaining a unified mood throughout the duration of the piece. This is partly accomplished through the selection of instruments, both familiar and unusual, that are played and recorded with a sometimes unorthodox approach. Household/found objects such as wind chimes, a poster tube and a half filled bathtub are used alongside more traditional instruments such as zither, tibetan temple bowls, trombone and an armenian doudouk in an attempt to provide a fresh listening experience. Equally important is the amount of time given for ideas to grow and develop naturally without feeling forced or contrived. The end result of these efforts is a lush sonic tapestry that is unique yet rooted in ancient and timeless sounds.

More information and samples are available at [stillsounds.com](http://stillsounds.com).

## **February 2007**

Music from the Still Life series by Nelson Foltz and Tom Lynn is being used to accompany the exhibit 'die Visualisierung des Unsichtbaren' (Visualizing the Unseen) by Emil Schult.

Schult, graphic designer and sometime member of the seminal electronic group Kraftwerk, has created a series of paintings examining the history and development of computational electronics and the point

where human users interface with such technologies. More information is available at [emilschult.de](http://emilschult.de).

New York based musician Nelson Foltz and Berlin based sound artist Tom Lynn have been collaborating on the Still Life series since 2003. The series explores slow-moving, pulsing, textural music created entirely without electronic instruments. More information on the series is available at [stillsounds.com](http://stillsounds.com).

The exhibit will be open February 27 through July 29, 2007 at the Villa Bosch in Heidelberg, Germany.

## **February 2007**

The latest installment in the Still Life series of recordings created by Nelson Foltz and Tom Lynn will be released this month on the independent Stillsounds label. Details and soundclips can be found at [stillsounds.com](http://stillsounds.com)

Still Life - volume two continues and expands the soundscapes of the previous recordings. The entire album is one 52-minute piece, composed of seamlessly connected musical sections which grow out of the sounds of everyday life. A subtle 60Hz electric hum is used as a first drone over which a choir of 'ghost bells' sounds. Everyday sounds from the listening environment, such as a faucet dripping or the tick of a clock, become part of the work and are integrated into the orchestration.

The whole piece slowly morphs from sparse to rhythmic and back again. This project explores the meditative aspects of rhythmic entrainment and the kind of transcendent experience that repetitive percussion can unlock. West African drumming and the trance-inducing music of religions like santeria and condomble were an indirect influence.

Once again the emphasis is on subtlety and maintaining a unified mood. This is accomplished through the selection of instruments, both familiar and odd, that are played and recorded in novel ways. This creates a soundscape that is new but rooted in ancient and timeless sounds.

## **March 2004**

New York-based trombone virtuoso Nelson Foltz and Berlin-based sound artist Tom Lynn announced the release of Still Life – volume one. This is the first installment in a planned series of instrumental compositions utilizing acoustic instruments and creative sound design to create a unique blend of fourth world/ambient/world and jazz influences.

The first track of still life - volume one was motivated by a desire to create music with a slow pace that unfolds organically rather than through determined forms. The music dictates the progression through time and it ultimately abandons most traditional formal musical elements. The piece grows out of silence and blends 35 minutes of music into a seamless whole.

Traditional western harmonic movement is replaced with drones in two tonalities and rhythmic and melodic developments are subtle and slow moving. This provides the listener with a space of

'estrangement' from musical preconceptions allowing for deeper, non-critical listening. Another key element of this feeling of newness is the sound palette which utilizes a small collection of acoustic instruments in unique ways, giving a sense of both familiarity and mystery.

The second track is a fifteen minute drone, based on the overtone series in A, which strips the musical elements down even deeper to their essence. It is a pure exploration of sound lacking all traditional melodic, rhythmic and harmonic development. The piece seems to be ever changing due to shifting timbres and tonal balances. Repeated listening can reveal layers of sonic interaction previously unnoticed. This drone is intended to prolong the sense of contemplation and reflection one can experience at the end of the first track.