

David Kettle, "Edinburgh Festival 2019 reviews: Below the Blanket / Samson Young: Real Music," *The Arts Desk*, August 6, 2019.



Edinburgh Festival 2019 reviews: Below the Blanket / Samson Young: Real Music

Two Edinburgh shows meld music, sound and visual art to beguiling effect

by [David Kettle](#) | Tuesday, 06 August 2019



Samson Young: Real Music ★★★

Over at the Talbot Rice Gallery, as part of the Edinburgh Art Festival, there's more melding of music and visuals from Hong Kong-based Samson Young, this time in works that bring musical issues squarely into the art gallery.

That meeting of disciplines is most obvious in his *Muted Situations #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's Fifth*, a witty and surprisingly compelling installation showing Cologne's Flore Symphony Orchestra play

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through Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony with entirely muted instruments, so that all we hear is the scrape of bows, the rattle of keys, the thump of dampened timpani. But with its plastic wrapped around string bridges and numerous other interventions, is Young's orchestra really simply muted, or instead "prepared" to produce noises it would never otherwise emit?

In the next room, a giant brass instrument seems about to emerge from the floor in *Possible Music* #2, while a curl of loudspeakers emit sonic signals from impossible instruments – apparently piccolo tubas or growling subsonic trumpets, their sounds manipulated (with the help of Edinburgh University's Next Generation Sound Synthesis research group) according to heat, size and any number of other factors.

Most fascinating – but most didactic, too – is Young's third installation, the two-sided video work *The World Falls Apart into Facts*. On one side, he presents a performance lecture on "echoic mimicry", the process whereby a cultural artifact (a Chinese folksong, say) is exported to another culture, altered, then reimported as if it were authentic. On the other is Young's own outlandish reinterpretation of "traditional" Japanese Togaku music – apparently imported from China centuries ago – and reimagined for a bizarre ensemble of musicians dressed as fruit and vegetables and a bell-bedecked horse wandering around the group. It raises a smile, certainly as a particularly extreme example of the issues Young discusses in his lecture, but it's questionable why this isn't simply a journal article or symposium paper. There's plenty to chew on here, certainly, but under scrutiny, cracks begin to appear.

- Samson Young: Real Music at the Talbot Rice Gallery until 5 October

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