

Laudation for the audio walk Machair by Duncan MacLeod

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From the very beginning it becomes clear: the main protagonist of this soundwalk is the landscape. A very special landscape, the “Machair” (hard C) or pronounced “Machair” (soft CH) in Scottish. It gives its name to Duncan MacLeod's soundwalk, which transports us to the western edge of Europe, to the Outer Hebrides. We are transported by sound and stand in the middle of the Machair, a blooming meadow landscape directly on the Atlantic coast.

The sea regularly washes shell sand onto the meadows with the wind and waves, making them very fertile. The Machair is also fertilized with washed-up seaweed, which the local farming families regularly spread on the meadows, sometimes by hand, as they explain in the soundwalk in their Scottish English. Over the centuries, this has created an ecologically unique landscape.

The soundwalk conveys this interplay between the natural landscape and human cultivation with a multi-layered sound composition. It interweaves field recordings with minimalist, calm sounds that pick up on the rhythm of wind and waves.

Rhythmic repetitions also characterize the traditional songs, which are given a lot of space in the soundwalk. The Gaelic songs tell of the landscape and its cultivation, the gathering of seaweed as well as the harvesting of potatoes, all of which are historic recordings.

However, Duncan Macleod does not paint a backward-looking audio image of the Machair and the people who live with it. Towards the end of the soundwalk, we hear that this labor-intensive form of farming is still alive today and will remain so. This is when the children of the farming families have their say. They seem to be standing next to us as they explain how their parents are making hay.

The voices of the local people, the descriptions of a landscape ecologist, the sound compositions and the Gaelic songs - all these elements are sensitively interwoven in the soundwalk.

The knowledge of the landscape, which is traditionally passed down orally in the Hebrides, has found an appropriate and innovative form in the artistic communication of the soundwalk.

Reasons enough for the jury to award a first prize to Duncan MacLeod's soundwalk “Machair”.