

McQuay

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“It takes listening to hundreds of hearts, thousands of hearts to detect anything different,” the student says on the recording. McQuay stops the recording.

“The development of the stethoscope allowed humans to hear things they couldn’t hear with just their two ears,” he said. “It allowed them to capture and study it, and begin to use it and treat people, to treat sound as a specimen like they would in the field.”

This is just one example of the concepts explored in “Close Listening: Decoding Nature Through Sound,” a series McQuay is working on for NPR’s “Morning Edition.” The seven-part series, to air every Thursday starting this week, seeks to explore the world we live in through the songs, calls, chirps and buzzes that surround us.

Cornell University keeps one of the world’s largest collections of natural sound — a collection stored on NPR’s behalf since 2005 — and sprouted the seeds of the series. The university’s legacy with the languages of the natural world dates back to 1929, when the first wildlife recordings were taken by Cornell researchers at Stewart Park in Ithaca.

Now McQuay, alongside NPR science correspondent Christopher Joyce and editor Alison Richards, looks to continue the legacy — to capture the passions and tales of seven scientists who have dedicated their lives and work to interpreting the music of nature itself.

The mission began years ago with an NPR series that sought to do for sound what National Geographic did for pictures.

“Bill and I, having worked together on ‘Radio Expeditions’ for years, loved the people we met on the program,” Joyce said. “We had them, knew something about them and knew they were powerful personalities and important scientists in this field. The first rule of storytelling is people are interested in people. It’s their personalities, their struggles and insights that draw the listener into a story. Once you’ve established the characters, you can then introduce the intellectual content of the stories.”

McQuay, a Peabody Conservatory-trained sound engineer with a degree in composition, worked with Joyce at NPR to “transport the listener” to the exotic locations they documented, from Tibet to Dubai to the South American rainforests. Their discoveries were exhibited throughout the world, with the sounds — just the sounds — played for audiences from Washington, D.C., to China.

“We would bring these sounds to a theater and supplement them with stories of how they were captured,” McQuay said. “People always enjoyed them. In fact, our very first show was done at National Geographic in D.C. For that one, we actually showed a few slides with the sounds, and at the end, someone raised their hand and asked, ‘Why did you show the images? We came here to listen!’ We never showed images again.”



NICK REYNOLDS / STAFF PHOTO

Bill McQuay winds open the shelves of the sound archive at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

GET YOUR EARS ON

The NPR series “Close Listening: Decoding Nature Through Sound” starts this week on “Morning Edition”:

Thursday: A doctor diagnoses a patient with a heart murmur by listening, and the growth of a scientific “culture” of listening is discussed.

Aug. 6: Scientist Katy Payne discovers humpback whales not only sing but compose new songs each year.

Aug. 13: In the 1990s, Chris Clark realized whales communicate as they migrate, so people could track them. He also realized how noisy ship traffic is, and how it clouds the sonic world that marine mammals live in.

Aug. 20: Elephant infrasound is a part of elephant communication that we can’t hear. Katy Payne discovered it while sitting at the elephant enclosure at the Portland zoo. She went to Africa to live in the bush with elephants to record these unheard seismic rumblings, a whole “language” unknown to scientists.

Aug. 27: Tree-hoppers create bizarre sounds by rapping their heads on the stems. Rex Cocroft and Laurel Symes study highly complicated insect communities that divide up the sound spectrum the way radio stations divide up the radio spectrum, each finding a “broadcast” niche for its own species so that they can contact each other amid a noisy world.

Sept. 3: Erick Greene discovered that squirrels and chipmunks copy the alarm calls of birds — a sort of cross-species early warning system in our forests — to evade predators.

Sept. 10: The future: Scientists have now truly created a new discipline of close listening to explain the science of what lies below the ocean and deep in space, to reveal what vision cannot.

The medium of telling the story of language — through sound — required a method developed over years by the Joyce and McQuay. Influenced by the input of “Morning Edition” Executive Producer Tracy Wahl, the pair used the stories of the scientists and the sounds they had collected to create a juncture between the human experience and the science of sound.

“I don’t simply think of the story as just the natural sounds,” Joyce said. “It’s the sound of the human voice; that’s the great power of radio. A story told from one person to another person is the first kind of story we heard as kids sitting on our mother’s lap. It’s extremely powerful.”

An example of this is clear in episode three of the new series, where scientist

Chris Clark describes the language of whales, how they communicate and how the disruption of noises from ships sonically interrupts that world. Joyce said Clark’s inflection and tone in his voice make his passion for the subject clear and does well to tell the story in a way no other medium can accomplish.

“His passion for this world is so obvious in the tone of his voice and the way he speaks, he can’t help but infect you,” Joyce said.

Telling the story of nature through sound, Joyce said, is to view the world through a lens that many have forgotten to utilize over generations. Many have been content to watch the world through images on a screen, to have interpretations of the world prepackaged to them. “Close Listening” looks to be the antithesis of this, to provide tools for listeners to create their own view of the world.

“Visual images, in a way, are kind of constricting,” Joyce said. “What you see is what you get. But when you hear stories and hear sound, it creates an imaginative reflex in the mind, where you create movies in your head. Those are unique to each person. When I’m listening, I have to create this image in my brain using the spoken word, and that’s a collaboration between the listener and the storyteller you don’t get with any other medium.”

“One of my goals is just to get people to listen,” McQuay said. “If you just listen, the world would open up to you in ways that can only be opened through the sense of sound.”

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Mitchell

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awaits sentencing.

Wylie said the plea deal was important.

“I determined that although there were other possible charges in which to charge Ms. Mitchell with, that the people were confident that the two charges within the (court) information were charges that would be proven beyond a reasonable doubt,” Wylie told reporters Tuesday. “And in the interest of justice, I negotiated a plea and recommended a sentence.”

Matt, 49, and Sweat, 35, were the focus of a massive, three-week manhunt following their escape from the prison, a months-long process in which they cut through their cells into a series of catwalks before cutting into a steam pipe and exiting through a nearby manhole.

The chase ended in late June, when Matt was shot and killed by police and Sweat was later captured.

Both were convicted murderers, with Matt sentenced in the brutal death of his former boss in western New York and Sweat in prison for killing Broome County Sheriff’s Deputy Kevin Tarsia in 2002. Sweat, who is serving a life sentence, is now in the special-housing unit at Five Points Correctional Facility in Seneca County.

Mitchell, meanwhile, was expected to be the pair’s getaway driver but ultimately backed out of the plot. Without a Plan B, the inmates escaped to the densely wooded Adirondacks before they were discovered later in the month.

Donning classic black-and-white prison garb, Mitchell wiped tears from her eyes as she sat in court Tuesday, quietly waiving her right to a grand jury hearing as the judge read through the terms of her plea deal.

At one point, the judge had to ask Mitchell to speak up as he asked whether she understood the terms of the deal.

As part of her plea agreement, Mitchell agreed to cooperate fully with state Investigator General Catherine Leahy Scott, who has been leading an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the prison break.

“Today’s plea by Joyce Mitchell makes clear her culpability in the systemic breakdown that led to the escape of two cold-blooded killers,” Leahy Scott said in a statement.

“Nothing short of her full cooperation will be tolerated, and I am confident that when she fulfills this obligation, I will provide a thorough and complete accounting of all the factors contributing to this elaborate breakout, with an eye toward ensuring this never happens again.”

Wylie said he plans to pursue first-degree escape charges against Sweat, and the case will likely go to a grand jury next month. Sweat is already serving a life sentence.

Another prison worker charged in the scheme, Gene Palmer, has not reached a plea deal with prosecutors, and that case, too, will head to a grand jury next month, Wylie said.

But Wylie said he does not expect any other charges against anyone in the case.

Follow Jon Campbell on Twitter @JonCampbellGAN.

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STATE INVESTIGATOR GENERAL CATHERINE LEAHY SCOTT

Corning Inc. reports growth in 2nd quarter

Optical communications business growth leads the way, company says

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Corning Inc. on Tuesday announced second-quarter results that showed some businesses surging while others predictably held steady or declined slightly.

Based on Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), net sales in the quarter topped \$2.5 billion, a 6 percent increase over the same period last year.

Net income skyrocketed 193 percent to \$496 million compared with the second quarter of 2014. And earnings per share were up 227 percent.

Core sales and earnings, which factor in variables that are not included in GAAP calculations, are more subdued this time around.

Overall, however, company officials are pleased with the performance, which was led by growth in optical communications.

“That business did extremely well, with (core) sales up 17 percent,” said Tony Tripeny, Corning Inc. vice president and corporate controller. “It was driven by fiber-to-home sales. More and more people are bringing fiber right to their homes for greater bandwidth.”

Core sales and earnings saw modest growth in the display technologies business, while sales were down slightly from last year’s second quarter in environmental technologies, specialty materials and life sciences.

Those declines were expected and planned for.

“Whenever a new technology is introduced at a premium price, over time that price will decline,” said Dan Collins, Corning Inc. vice president of corporate communications. “The challenge we have is to create manufacturing efficiencies to offset the price declines. It’s a natural progression.”

In addition, the decline in life sciences income was pinned on a weaker Euro.

Corning Inc. shares declined 8 cents Tuesday, or 0.4 percent, to \$18.37 at the close of trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Looking ahead, Tripeny expects continued improvement overall, with strong performance among some businesses and moderate growth or slight declines in others.

“We think in the third quarter, we’ll see moderate sales for display glass. Other businesses will be similar to what we’ve seen so far,” Tripeny said. “Optical communications, we think, will be up for the entire year. That’s significant growth. We feel great about Gorilla Glass 4. It’s had spectacular success and is the fastest-growing version we’ve had.”

Keith Snyder, equity analyst with S&P Capital IQ, agrees there are reasons for Corning Inc. to be optimistic about what lies ahead.

“Overall, I would say it was a very strong quarter for them,” Snyder said. “You have somewhat flat demand in the telecom industry as a whole, but they are finding ways to expand their business. We see that as a driver of growth heading into the third quarter.”

Follow Jeff Murray on Twitter @SGJeffMurray.