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Bill Fontana's installation at Western Bridge is tuned into industrial sounds

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When John Cage observed that music happens all the time but we only listen some of the time, he hadn't anticipated the listening skills of Bill Fontana.

From Cage, Fontana learned that all sound is art, but Fontana added something that wasn't especially important to Cage: pleasure. While a Cage concert could be painful, Fontana orchestrates the random sounds from urban daily life into a richly symphonic flow.

For "Objective Sound" at Western Bridge, Fontana brought the outside sounds of Western Bridge's Duwamish industrial neighborhood indoors, playing them on a range of resonant objects, also from the neighborhood, such as steel floats and pulleys. If Dylan Thomas were alive, he might say Fontana's sound sings in its chains like the sea.


Western Bridge is taping this live concert to preserve a record of the current uses of the district as it moves from heavy uses to multiple use, but Fontana's sound is not the district's. What Wallace Stevens wrote about Picasso's Blue Period painting of an old guitarist is true of Fontana's work, "Things as they are/ Are changed upon the blue guitar." Although Fontana titled his show "Objective Sound," there's nothing remotely objective about the results, these rare choirs of industrial tools singing room to room.

Through Aug. 4 at Western Bridge, 3412 Fourth Ave. S., Thursdays-Saturdays noon-6 p.m. Free.

-- Regina Hackett

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Steel floats resonate with sound in "Objective Sound" at Western Bridge.

