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The Thing in the Gap-Stone Style: Alice Oswald's Acoustic Arrangements

[Jack Thacker](#) ✉

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‘BEFORE WRITING’, SAYS ALICE OSWALD, ‘I always spend a certain amount of time preparing my listening. I might take a day or sometimes as much as a month picking up the rhythms I find, either in other poems or in the world

around me'.¹ In concert with Oswald's role as listener, the focus of this essay will be on listening to the carefully selected rhythms of her poems. Oswald's verse is as rhythmical as it is unpredictable, and in order to decipher the rich phonic texture of her poetry readers must first prepare their own listening and engage in what the composer and acoustic ecologist R. Murray Schafer refers to as an exercise in 'ear cleaning'.² 'Listen Listen Listen Listen', writes Oswald...

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