

Pauline Oliveros collaborator **Ione** has continued their mission to connect communities and listeners after her partner's death. By **Vanessa Ague**



Ione (left) and Pauline Oliveros performing at Kanazawa 21st Century Museum of Art, Japan, 2005

Deep Listening is a process that encourages us to open our ears to all there is to hear. That's what Pauline Oliveros's longtime life and creative partner Ione (sometimes styled IONE), a writer, playwright and director in her own right, tells me over a Zoom call from her home in Kingston, New York. As we talk, there's a clang in my living room. Ione immediately homes in on the sound, picking up on it along with my voice. "What was that?" she asks. "That was an interesting sound." I reply that it was a plate hitting a table, I think. "It was just for us," she says with a laugh. "It was Pauline in the other room."

Throughout more than three decades together, Ione and Oliveros worked on many multidisciplinary projects uniting Ione's texts with Oliveros's music. Their works, and Ione's solo art, often explore themes of colonialism and gender. *Njinga The Queen King*; *The Return Of A Warrior*, for example, tells the story of Njinga, a 17th century Angolan leader, diplomat and freedom fighter who wore her father's attire to be able to rule. Another large part of Ione and Oliveros's practice is a desire to support other artists and unite a global community.

Her work extends across artistic mediums, but she's dedicated much of her time to writing. She describes herself as always having great observational skills and being a lover of books. One of her early memories is finding her grandmother's girdle when she misplaced it, and there's a couple of paragraphs about this in a journal she wrote at age ten. "It says a lot about me," she says. "[It's] my

writer's eye, describing my situation, my inner and outer life."

In the 1970s, Ione spent a brief period in Europe with her former husband and three children. While living there, she eagerly looked out the window, watching the mailman drive down the roadway to her farmhouse in a little yellow truck. But he never had any letters for them. "As soon as we left the States it was like we didn't exist any more," she says. So she started collecting the letters they had and turned them into a magazine called *Letters Magazine*.

That magazine launched her freelance writing career, which led to her writing for publications like *The Village Voice*. Freelance writing, a notoriously low paying job, wasn't easy, especially for someone who needed to support herself and her children. On the plus side, it did open creative doors. While she was writing, she discovered the 1868 diary of her activist and author great-grandmother, Frances Ann Rollin. These writings inspired Ione's 1991 memoir, *Pride Of Family, Four Generations Of American Women Of Color*.

Ione met Oliveros in the 1980s while she was working on her writing projects. They started collaborating on improvised text-music works that expanded Ione's practice. "It was a real gift to me," she says. Instead of focusing on narrative-like traditional spoken word, she improvised texts based on her surroundings. That Oliveros was an encouraging person helped Ione become more uninhibited with her art: "If you are supported in who you really are, then that helps you to create fully."

Oliveros and Ione dreamed of forming a worldwide community with their art, a dream that Ione continues today: in 2020, she led *The Worldwide Tuning Meditation* on Zoom, a guided meditation encouraging participants to notice their surroundings. Over Zoom, it reached more than 4000 people on all continents. "I realised that that was exactly what Pauline had in mind," Ione says, describing Oliveros as a futurist. "We always knew there's going to be a bigger one and that was it."

The recent years since Oliveros's death have been busy for Ione. At Mills College she recently performed *Pauline Dreams: A Sonic Dream Mandala*, a video and performance featuring *The Worldwide Tuning Meditation* and *Sounds From Childhood*. She has also been helping to make an intimate documentary, *The Story Of Pauline Oliveros*, which is forthcoming. Ione is also continuing her opera practice: for Irish National Opera in 2021, she and composer Karen Power created a six minute piece on the theme of isolation and how to be in touch with the environment; she's presently preparing another opera using VR.

The undercurrent binding these projects together is a desire to support people's growth through art. That desire bonded Ione with Oliveros from the start, and continues to drive her practice today. It is about observing how change shapes our lives and helps us become who we are; and how art can reflect and examine that. After all, "evolution, it's what we're doing here on this planet", concludes Ione. □ ionedreams.us

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