

The Call

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In Germanic folklore the twelve nights between Christmas and the Epiphany are called the *Rauhnächte* (the harsh nights). According to legend, during this period *die Wilde Jagd* (the wild pursuit) in the form of a *Geisterzug* (ghost parade), consisting of souls who have died before their time, appears every evening, racing across the winter sky. Important is not to cast one's eyes on this ghostly procession, lest one be swept along and held captive for years to come. It is possible, however, to know when to look away as these are noisy ghosts, fiercely rattling bells and shakers or howling and screaming as one might expect ghosts are wont to do. But sometimes too these spirits play a more melodious music, something to soothe our heavy hearts when thinking of all these poor departed souls. In any case, it is best to stay at home and pray!

And so, a couple days after New Year I completely ignored all traditional advice and went for a walk one evening in my neighborhood here in Zürich. In point of fact, we do generally have very heavy winds during this period between Christmas and January 6. As I left my house, great gusts of icy air sent the clouds racing by above as in a time-elapsed film. An incredibly full moon lit up the night like a gigantic floodlight. Everything seemed to be shaking and vibrating around me: cans and bottles skittering down the street; a street sign rattling violently; vague droning sounds appearing and vanishing suddenly as the wind seeped through cracks and crevices between buildings; noise banks erupting from trees as their branches trembled in a ferocious blast of freezing air. I felt enthralled at this magnificent symphony of noises and vast pressure drops of sound engulfing me, swallowing me whole and then spitting me out again to send me scurrying away into the darkness. At any moment I expected a *Geisterzug* to appear and, should I not avert my gaze in time, sweep me along with it and away across the heavens to points unknown.

The next day I began listening to the LP you hold in your hands. I could see the trees shaking, the streetlamps vibrating in the moonlight and feel the ground shaking beneath my feet as the city streetcars rolled heavily against the furious winds and slogged off out of sight. Or had I already heard this music the night before, as in a dream? An epiphany of sound.

Jason Kahn