

VOICE IN THE

DAVID GRUBBS

HEADPHONES

THE VOICE IN THE HEADPHONES

BUY

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THE VOICE IN THE
HEADPHONES
DAVID GRUBBS

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The one thing I like about popular music is that they record it. They record it, record it, record it, record it! The astute producer cuts out the magic from the different tapes (*laughter*), and puts them in a certain order and gets the whole piece.

—ROBERT ASHLEY

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The voice in the headphones says, “You’re rolling”

followed by ten seconds of line-hum silence, an intercom-like click, and the reminder “You’re still rolling.”

One rolls. Will roll. Will still roll, will break the seal

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on another workday at the former Skylight Magnetic Recording Services, now just Skylight Recording. Think Tuesday or Wednesday, perpetual charmed workday, and try to pierce the headspace

of the person on the other side of the glass, the one who rolls tape. Who rolled tape when tape exclusively rolled. The one who monitors the virtual tape transport, who with competent diffuse

concentration watches software fader-representations fly, who in spite of fatigue keeps a gentle controlling hand on the session, driving commercial freight bumper to bumper, night after night into morning after morning.

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Skylight rents tape

by the reel. Envision the various storage spaces along the Gowanus Canal and all the reels of two-inch tape moldering inside. At one time they were sourced from a dealer opposite Green-Wood Cemetery, the last tape and recording media one-stop hunkered among retailers of headstones and memorial monuments. Admit to the temptation to pulp those reels. The doctrine of attractive nuisance states that sometime in the future a person unknown to you will try their hand at improving upon mixes that you made as a very young and confident person, and so dumping sites beckon.

Roll rented tape

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to savor the full stop of the tape transport as it slams like a circuit breaker. Relish the precursor, pre-flashing-cursor, antecedent to digital media's attendant cursor, the newly internalized minute and mile marker

less pulsing than metro-

noming beneath eyelids. The end of a reel of two-inch tape forcefully punctuates. Engage the high-speed rewind, gun it in the straightaway, and steel yourself as the end of the reel flaps insanely. Point a microphone at the acoustic event of the tape machine's possession, but do it quickly before the tantrum passes, before the thing completely shreds. Record ten or twenty seconds of it, an almost unbearably long take, and then multitrack multiple passes of however many slaps per second. Fade in on the unfortunate scene.

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It snowed nearly a foot last night.

Winter palace. The world outside the studio

that much more muted. Hard to ignore such symmetry.

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Rent tape to warm things up. Rent tape to militate against unseemly sharpness, to denature digital, and hail the hoary apparition of the best worst sound system you know intimately. Stand down, pixel.

Rent tape to track the snake.

Loop the snake escaping and snake the loop reentering the machine. Repeat beyond necessary. Maintain the tape loop's tension with mic stands as macro capstan shafts, and send around the perimeter of the control room this compendium of a dozen perspectives on the flapping of the end of a reel of tape, a flustered aviary of. Roll at fifteen inches per second and then seven and a half and still slower. Inch it forward by hand, rock it back and forth. Send it down an octave and more while rippling the surface with slight tugs and flocking salutations.

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