

SUMMER 2015

IAN SKEDD: SIGN SINGING: LOVE WILL TEAR US
APART, JOY DIVISION, 1979, DEAF CHOIR, 2009



EXHIBITIONS | CENTRAL MEDIATHEQUE

Ian Skedd: Sign Singing: Love Will Tear Us Apart, Joy Division, 1979, Deaf Choir, 2009

Curated by Jennifer Matotek, Director/Curator

JULY 6 TO SEPTEMBER 4, 2015

“Danger to the State”

by Jennifer Matotek

“Musical innovation is full of danger to the State, for when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them.”

Plato, *The Republic*

The experience and meaning of music is physical, intellectual and spiritual. Songs are fundamentally social, as items for popular and often communal consumption. Music exists, experientially, in the space between the ear and the eye, as both sound and sight. It is seen and heard through the act of performance. Through the performing body, music has inherently political dimensions.

Ian Skedd’s *Sign Singing: Love Will Tear Us Apart, Joy Division 1979, Deaf Choir 2009* challenges our understanding of what constitutes the experience and

meaning of music and musical performance. In the video, twelve people enter a stage, dressed in black and white. They assemble in a triangular arrangement, and pause, staring off-camera as they begin performing. Using American Sign Language (ASL), they perform the 1979 pop song by Joy Division, *Love Will Tear Us Apart*. The song, written at a time of great stress in the life of lead singer Ian Curtis, is, lyrically, exceptionally dark. It expresses the isolation Curtis likely felt at the time surrounding his failing marriage, his complicated affair, and the birth of his first child, on top of professional pressures, all while he was responding poorly to the barbiturates he was taking to manage his increasingly severe epilepsy.

The timing of Ian Skedd's choir is imperfect. Despite their similar black and white formal dress, the emotions on the performer's faces and the energy behind their movements aren't identical in timing or emphasis. Some move their lips as they perform. Others keep their faces stoic while their performance inhabits their body. But the emotions expressed are uniform. As in traditional music, the performers use the sight of their bodies to produce and present a song. But the sound of this choir is not the human voice. The sounds are rustling clothing, inhalations and exhalations. Silence fills the spaces where the instrumental portions of the song are performed.

None of the performers have heard the song *Love Will Tear Us Apart*. Recruited through Vancouver's Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

(WIDHH), they have, working together, translated the lyrics to ASL and memorized them as part of their commitment to the project. In conceptualizing, facilitating, and documenting these performances, artist Ian Skedd proposes that perhaps music, and musical performance, exists outside the feedback loop between ear and the eye, and that musical performance ought to be differently conceived of and understood. It reminds us how that the mainstream defines, conceives, and limits the world in ways which do not literally and conceptually speak for everyone. In proposing new ways we might make music legible, and seeable, to a hearing and non-hearing public, the danger to the state presented by Skedd's art work is its demand to reconsider the place of music and musical sound within society and culture.

Artist Biography

Ian Skedd is a multidisciplinary artists working with installation, intervention, performance, sound, and video. After getting a Cecil Lewis Sculpture scholarship, he moved to London, England, to complete an MFA at Chelsea College of Art and Design. Skedd is currently based in Vancouver, BC.



CREDITS

IAN SKEDD *Sign Singing: Love Will Tear Us Apart, Joy Division, 1979, Deaf Choir, 2009* (detail), 2009, video. Photo: Scott Massey
IAN SKEDD *Sign Singing: Love Will Tear Us Apart, Joy Division, 1979, Deaf Choir, 2009*, 2009, video. Photo: Don Hall



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