

# I SWEAR I HEARD THIS...

## *PING PONG DUET*

Sharonne Specker

It was a ping pong duet, I told them.

*They laughed.*

No really. I heard them, the ping pong balls. They were talking, singing a song.

*Ping pong balls don't sing, they said. Or talk.*

These ones did, I said. It was a summer evening, golden light, insects meandering, and that syncopated duet, unexpected, comical, treble voices above the hum.

But not a duet for long, I told them.

A chorale, then, or perhaps a madrigal, voices weaving in and out, in counterpoint, as the long, languorous notes of the alphorns joined in. Was that one, or two? Three? Four? Five?? Five. Five sonorous voices, layers of sound and reverberation, carrying faintly but firmly across the hill.

And always their little musical partners, piping up alongside, sharing snippets of song, story, and play.

*Ping pong balls don't sing, they said again. They don't tell stories.*

These ones did, I said. Of lighthearted laughter, of sharing space, of claiming sound, of recent arrivals—to the park, region, country—enjoying the moment, the mellow mood, in tandem with their fellow performers.

And the alphorns underneath, a floating carpet of resonance.

And always the endless mountains in the background, rising up over the lake, a landscape of dreams and imaginings. And cows. Lots of cows.

And then again, the ping pong balls. Bright, peppery. Cutting into the here, the now. As the game rises, the song speeds up, the balls' voices chatter with hectic urgency, mingling with the horns' placid drones, a sparkling composition of spontaneous joy and vibration.

*Just noise, they shrug. An accident. Coincidence.*

And then the light fades, and the shadows stretch, and the group of men wraps up their practice and packs up their alphorns from the park, and the two young boys meander off, ping pong balls in pockets, echoes of the song fading quickly.

I swear it was there, though. I swear I heard it. For a moment. Promise.

**Sharonne Specker** is an anthropologist with an interest in sound and sensory ethnography, identity and citizenship, collective memory and tradition, and creative research methodologies. Her doctoral studies at the University of St. Andrews explored the relationship between Swiss folk music and the learning of place, belonging, and homeland. Adjacent to her academic work, she has studied and taught classical voice.





