

Serenity

Wingshan: [00:00:00] Catch feels is a five-part podcast made by 1525 Collective from Nottingham Contemporary in collaboration with artist Meera Shatki Osborne and DJ producer AG. It sits alongside a wider project and touring exhibition entitled "Making Histories," where different groups around the UK explore a single emotion in each session by sharing sounds, experimenting in textiles and simply talking about it together.

This project is funded by Arts Council England and the Garfield Weston foundation. Our introduction music is called "Wholesome" by Kevin MacLeod.

Episode three, serenity.

Meera: [00:01:32] That was from Nausicaa of the Wind and the Valleys, which is a Studio Ghibli film on Netflix, if you want to watch it. What do you do to bring yourself serenity? Is there a person or a place that makes you feel this way? And when was the last time you felt serenity?

Young Person 1: [00:01:59] I think a place where I feel serenity is just anywhere in nature, where you can really, like, hear where you can hear birds, or like just water flowing. I think I feel really peaceful and calm then or even just like sunsets, sun rises. Yeah. Things like that.

Young Person 2: [00:02:21] The last time I felt serene was when I was walking home. It was on Monday, actually. I just gone out with my boyfriend and I came home and there was all these starlings, like sweeping around my head, cause they've all been, I don't know why they're coming at the moment, but like I've seen them all over the place, like sweeping by my house and everything. They might be outside right now. Not right now. That's a shame because I could have showed you.

But yeah, they, they literally thousands of them all coming, like sweeping over my head. And you know, they do that thing where they like congregate really weirdly. In big groups and then they all sweep down and then they'll separate out again. And it's like just really satisfying to watch. And it just feels very otherworldly as well, you can't quite believe that like our world has that kind of beauty in it. You know what I mean?

Young Person 3: [00:03:08] Yeah. I agree with the nature comments. I think for me, I really like going on long walks, like, especially on my own. And just thinking about things. And I think I find that peaceful and serene because it's like, you're just constantly moving. I think that kind of makes me feel quite calm. And I like being surrounded by like a lot of trees. So like walking through woods and stuff. And then I will say I'm quite lucky where I live because it's narrowed a lot of parks and there's a weir near my house. So sometimes I'll go and listen to the water, like crashing down and I find that quite peaceful. And the sound of rain. And also there's a lot of birds in my garden. So just that sound for me is quite serene.

Wingshan: [00:04:03] For me, it's, it's, it's difficult because I, I tend to experience emotions in extremes. And I think serenity is... you can't really be extremely serene, I think because it's such a chill emotion and I'm such kind of a chaotic feeling... feeling person. I really struggle

to get to that serenity. It's similar to what you said earlier in the check-ins where it's like, my head's going at, you know, a thousand miles per hour. So sometimes I have to just watch trashy TV in order to almost, how can that trashy TV, maybe I'm saying trashy TV is my serenity. It isn't, because... well maybe it is.

Meera: [00:04:48] It's interesting how we put this like value judgment on like ways in which we should feel serenity and times we shouldn't feel serenity, you know, like it's good... it's a good thing... You're doing well if you feel serenity in nature, but if you're watching TV, then that's somehow not good.

Wingshan: [00:05:10] It depends on the TV. I mean, studio Ghibli is incredible, but studio Ghibli is almost like being in nature. The studio Ghibli is all about the everyday and the small things. I think studio Ghibli just emulates serenity.

Meera: [00:05:27] I can definitely relate to what you're saying when she's done about, I was thinking about a time. when I was in like Sinai in the desert, like by the, by the red sea and it's so quiet and peaceful there. And I was staying there for about a week in just like a little hut on the beach and there was no one else there just me and my friend.

And it was interesting because in a way, if I hadn't done that and I thought about it, I would think about how, how much serenity or how serene I would feel. But actually the quietening down of everything and the stillness and it was just, it made my, it made me feel like my thoughts were so loud.

And I felt like there was actually so much going on by the end of it, you know? And I, yeah, I think I was craving that trashy TV or something.

Young Person 2: [00:06:23] I'm just going to say serenity for me... I often feel quite like aware of myself, like the existence of my body. And like, you just feel very grounded sometimes when you feel serene, like, especially when it's music it's brought on by music, like I've listened to I don't know if any of you like Haley Hendricks.

But I found a lot, I mean, I've listened to her for years actually, but sometimes you find somebody and then you don't go through all their stuff, you know? And just yesterday and today I've been listening to like more of her albums and stuff. Just sitting in the dark, listening to music, you know, and it, especially like, I feel like in lockdown, you become very less aware of your physical form because you just don't use, you don't really appreciate your body because you don't have to be like doing activity as much.

You know, I don't. I do. Cause it kinda it's, it's not good because it means you don't have as much self, not for like the things your body can do for you. Like being able to go on long walks or like hang out with your friends and stuff like that, because I've mostly just sat on my bed all day. Like I do go out sometimes, but you just, it feels like a bit irrelevant to you, like your legs and your arms and things.

But yeah, when you're kind of sitting in the dark, just listen to things, you just become very aware that you like, exist. I don't know how to explain it, but that's what I've been feeling recently.

Young Person 1: [00:07:39] When I feel I'm serene, I feel very present. Like, for example, like when I do yoga I feel... well when I do yoga it's pretty gentle. So I already feel like my body moving. So I like that a lot more serene and I guess... yeah, I just feel really present and grounded and I really feel my body and feel myself like, yeah, my physical form that that's when they feel peaceful and serene.

Wingshan: [00:08:09] That's so interesting because I, I don't know. I, I it's, when I don't feel my body, I feel serene because maybe it's cause I, I, I have chronic fatigue, so I don't always trust my body, but it's, it's more emotions for me than it is physical.

Meera: [00:08:28] I think the last time I felt serene... serenity? I find it quite difficult to like put it in, put that word in a sentence.. Last time I felt serene was in, I think it was, it was when the leisure centres were still open. So that must have been October, maybe. And I went swimming and I like love swimming.

I used to... Before the pandemic I'd swim all the time. And I went swimming at my local pool and I had goggles which I think I only feel serenity in water if I have goggles and I went swimming in the pool and it was completely empty. It was just me. And I think there's this, this just feeling of weightlessness.

So I think I'm in between you two like I really am in my body, but I have no weight. And I think for me, that's like a, yeah, a feeling of serenity and seeing myself like being able to watch myself and watch space underwater. I think that's also why the Nausicaa prompt like really did it for me.

Cause it's that like lifting up. Like that weightlessness of being lifted up.

Young Person 2: [00:09:34] Yeah. And that's definitely even, cause I definitely relate to that, in that I also really love swimming and I haven't been able to go for a while. But I'd say it's especially true when you're in the sea because of the fact that you can hear the noise of like... it's just like a very specific sound that you don't get anywhere else when you like under water and you can hear the stones clicking together underneath the water. That's like my favorite sound ever. And then there'll be like other songs, like, you know, when you kind of come up into the open air, when you're out of the water, then it's like being in a entirely different world.

Meera: [00:10:05] So you've got like the two extremes and yeah, you just feel like you're flying. Cause you feel completely weightless and everything. That thing of like, I feel like I did this a lot as a kid. It's like playing with sounds, you know, like going in and out of there.

Young Person 4: [00:10:19] I would have to say nature as well, specifically... well, I was born and grew up in an area that was just the starting point of a national park. So it was lots of mountains. And my favorite thing was going to play in the mountain streams and just look at the snakes swimming down. Yeah. And just hearing the sound of the water, sort of smashing against the rocks. Cause mountain streams can be quite, I guess, lively.

But for me, when I go out in nature, I don't feel that awareness of my body... it's the opposite. I lose track of time. I'm not, I'm not really thinking. I'm just listening. I'm just

existing, I guess. Yeah. And I'm not really thinking about my body or my existence, you know, I kind of just lose track and sense of everything around me, apart from the sounds. And I guess I enjoy the sensory experience of being out in nature.

AG: [00:11:21] So serenity, I don't know. I find it so hard cause like I'd like to say sleep maybe when I'm, when I'm asleep I'm serene, but like I have like insomnia and I've had insomnia my whole life. So sleep has not really... there's a lot of like emotions tied up with sleep. And like not getting sleep and like feeling guilty cause you can't get sleep. So I don't know. I don't know. I don't know about serenity.

Meera: [00:11:49] One thing that you missed, which was ... Wingshan was talking about, maybe similar to you that those feelings and that TV makes her feel serene.

Wingshan: [00:12:02] Well, just because it's like the absence of these like buzzing thoughts that are like a thousand miles an hour and it's, it's trashy TV that drowns it out, but then sometimes I'll watch trashy TV and then it, like, sometimes I might... a situation there might be triggering or something like this wasn't as safe as I thought it was. Which is why I don't think it's the greatest coping mechanism, just because it's, there is a toxicity in it as well.

Meera: [00:12:34] So I'm quite like basic, I guess. And so I just like all TV, I just like relate to so heavily and like dream about it and like really go like all TV, just like really goes into me and like for awhile I was watching a Married at First Sight Australia, and I realized that I was like dreaming of it.

And then in the mornings it'd be like the first thing I'd think about. And I'd be like, starting my day. Just like, thinking about all these different... I know I had to stop watching it.

AG: [00:13:02] Yeah. When I started watching orange is the new black I was bingeing it and then I don't know, like I can be very obsessive. So I was like, Oh, I can't go to toilet. Like lights out. But like, I could go to toilet. I was watching the program. I wasn't in jail. I decided that maybe like reading is when I feel like most serene.

Meera: [00:13:25] I can relate definitely to that. Like, like feeling that, like I need my brain to be occupied, to feel relaxed and, and serene. But I think, I wonder if like, cause a lot of you guys were talking about almost like moments of stillness in nature, these sorts of things of times you feel relaxed. And I wonder if it's the kind of thing you have to practice, like slowing your brain down.

You know, and like the more I use social media the shorter my attention span is like, you know, that sort of trajectory. I wonder if you can train yourself to feel more or to be able to feel more serene without things to occupy you. I dunno.

AG: [00:14:14] I have ADHD. So like, I think I've associated serenity with like slowness and I never really experience that many slow moments.

Meera: [00:14:26] What does serenity mean to people? Because maybe I don't actually really know. Yeah.

Young Person 3: [00:14:32] I think it is stillness. And I was thinking about this song by Amy Winehouse. I think it's wake up alone. Where, she says like, the silent... Silent sense of content. So I think it is that kind of feeling. But then I think for me, like, it's hard to explain, but you know, like if I listened to the weir, or like the rain, that's like a constant like steadiness. So it's also that, which I wouldn't class as stillness, but it's like, there's a rhythm to it as well.

Young Person 2: [00:15:02] I feel like serenity means more to me than I've ever thought it has done. Cause like I've never really used that word. So I suppose it sometimes takes like a conversation like this to realize that it's something that actually matters a lot because like there's a lot of ways that you can define it. And actually, like, I feel like it is in my life quite often, but I just don't really like actively notice it or like use the vocabulary of serenity to like describe it.

But yeah. 'cause especially like while I've like while I've got a really good project on the go, like an art project or something, just like listening to music and just losing time being completely focused on it. That's like the type of serenity, like I think it can happen like so often without you really acknowledging it. You know what I mean?

AG: [00:15:50] That's just made me think and what, okay. What Maddison and Merla both said has made me think and like times where, like, there's like a. Like, well, when I'm doing something consistent and steady, like, I dunno, like braiding my hair or something. I feel like I do sink into like a state of serenity because your hands are busy.

So you're not like on your phone or like typing or anything. And you can just listen to music and just like do something with your hands. And it just. You just like go and into like a, like, not like a zombie kind of state yet, but you know, when you're doing something like repetitive... when you're doing something repetitively, you just sink into like a state of rhythm and yeah, I think that would be serenity for me.

Young Person 1: [00:16:39] Yeah. I think the idea of losing track of time, I kind of feel that because it's not as, even if I'm not necessarily actually, I think Meera, you mentioned it kind of earlier about. Maybe practice, like learning how to, I mean, not saying that serenity only comes from not thinking about anything or stillness, but learning how to practice it.

Like, I didn't know, for example, meditation, I think the more you do it, the best you do get better at it.

AG, what you

Young Person 4: [00:17:17] were describing really reminded me of ASMR videos. I feel like they put me into a state of serenity, like, yeah, I really enjoy kind of getting my mind off of things completely and only focusing on the task at hand.

And I also get that when people play with my hair as well, it puts me in a weird ASMR kind of mood when I'm like completely in tune with all the sounds around me. And like, I guess the feeling of someone touching your hair or whatever it is that I'm doing. So like the, like now when we're sewing, I can... listening to you guys kind of puts me in that weird ASMR mood

and I'm kind of feeling the texture of the thread while I'm struggling to thread it through the needle.

Meera: [00:18:01] I feel like all of you that really like highlighted like the like this idea of like in my head of like rhythm being to do with serenity. And that feels really like, I've never really thought of it like that. And it feels really freeing because I think I, I struggle a lot with too many thoughts in my head, but this idea that I can do my hair, like, does that or doing my nails, moisturizing, like these really like basic things.

And I don't really, I know that they feel good and that's why I do them, but it's really nice to think about the serenity. It feels really kind of like special... maybe Merla what you were saying. Like that makes it feel quite special. These these moments that I've never really given a title to.

Can we share serenity? Can we like have moments of serenity collectively?

AG: [00:18:47] Yeah, religion.

Wingshan: [00:18:53] Yeah. I was going to say what Pria said about losing track of time. Like losing track of time with another person, but then I think it's still very intimate. You have to be very intimate, but then I guess religion is different. You don't have to be intimate. It's a community, isn't it.

AG: [00:19:14] Okay. So I I've like I've kind of shied away from religion, my whole life, because I have a very religious family both sides.

My mom's side and my dad's side, different religions. So there's a lot of tension around religion and stuff like that. But even though I'm not as religious as like my parents probably would have wanted me to be like, when I go to like, Like Holy places, or like, I dunno, like if I'm at a family gathering and people are praying and like praying together, like there is a sort of feeling of collective serenity, even if I'm not as attached to what's going on as everyone else. I still feel that feeling.

Meera: [00:20:04] I can definitely relate to that because I've got two religions as well in my family, one of them, I feel is very... Not very serene and the other one feels much more serene because there's more like songs and like women together doing stuff or something. But it just reminded me of this place that I went to, which was in Karnataka in, in South India and it was like this wood and the wood is like surrounded with loads and loads of farmland and it's all. And it used to all be woods like really diverse biodiverse landscape, which has been completely flattened for farming, but there's this one wood left and it's there because there's a temple there basically like Holy men or whoever went and built temples in wooded areas to stop them getting knocked down.

So it's like this massive wood and this tiny little temple, but because of the temple, it has to stay. And that whole wood was like so it felt so like magical because of that.

Where do you feel serenity in your body? Does it move around? And is there a pattern to your serenity?

Young Person 2: [00:21:19] So this is cheating basically because I recorded this a few days ago. And it was when, I don't know if they're still frozen over, but like, obviously it was really cold last week. So everything's frozen over, down at the place I was walking with my family. So I recorded this sound of like my brothers skimming stones all the way across the Lake.

Young Person 3: [00:21:39] I just record out of my window just now. Cause I'm on the back of the house and there's a river at the bottom of the garden, and then you can hear the weir just up the road, like you can kind of hear like it's basically just white noise. So I'll see if this comes through.

Meera: [00:22:00] That was so beautiful. I think I need to get out of the city.

AG: [00:22:08] Having the river right by your window! I'm so jealous, I've got a motorway.

Young Person 1: [00:22:14] I cheated a bit as well, but this is just one of the, this is a video I took a while ago. I think it's like one of my favorite videos and you can... I mean, it looks really nice. but sounds quite nice as well. It's like, you can hear, I think it actually it's near Niagara falls, but before the actual like, waterfall, so it's just kind of like the river and it's like at sunset and you can kind of hear birds.

I think I'll show the video as well. Cause it's a nice view.

Young Person 4: [00:22:49] I just went outside and kind of recorded the sound of the wind. I'm not sure if you'll be able to hear, again, I think it might just be white noise, like Maddie's river sound.

Meera: [00:23:07] Thank you all for sharing those sounds, they were really nice to listen to.

If everyone wants to sit comfortably, however you feel, and you can close your eyes or you can just find a point of focus. So just breathe in and out through your nose a few times when you feel comfortable in your breath.

And now when you're ready with your next out-breath make a humming noise for the whole length of your out-breath

And then breathe in again for your nose. And then as you breathe out, continue the humming for the entirety of your out-breath. And let's repeat this maybe eight times or until you feel that stopping.