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"PA" NEWS
Wed 30 Jun 2004



1:09pm (UK)

The Sound of A Waterfall in Space

By Martin Halfpenny, PA News

A British scientist has worked out what a waterfall might sound like in space and put a recording of it on the Internet.

Professor Tim Leighton from the University of Southampton has speculated how the sound of splashing liquid in deep space might differ to that heard on Earth.

As part of his work he recorded a waterfall in nearby Romsey, Hants, completed equations and then processed the sound to make what he believes is a the noise of liquid splashing in space.

The scientist could find out for real what liquid sounds like in space if NASA's Cassini mission to Saturn is a success.

The Cassini space craft will go into orbit around Saturn tomorrow where it will study the planet, its moons and rings for four years.

Attached to it is the European Space Agency's probe Huygens, which will study Saturn's moon Titan. After a seven-year journey strapped to the side of Cassini, the probe will separate from it on Christmas Day this year and land on Titan on January 14 2005. There are suggestions that the moon may be home to seas and streams made, not of water, but of liquid ethane. Professor Leighton is hoping that the probe's microphone might detect a splash-down as opposed to a crunch on landing and the question of what a splash in space might sound like would be answered.

Professor Leighton, who has speculated for several years on sounds in space, said: "I began asking whether the noise of splashes which is so familiar to us on Earth would be recognisable in a sea of liquid methane at a temperature of 180 degrees below zero.

"NASA's specially-commissioned painting of a waterfall – actually a methane fall – on Titan inspired me to attempt to predict how it would sound.

"I set up the equations and measured the sound of a small waterfall in Romsey. My colleague Dr Paul White then processed the signal to obtain what we believe would be the sound of a methane fall on Titan."

In the meantime, the professor has recreated the sound he believes it makes and put it on the Internet. The sound of the methane fall can be heard at www.isvr.soton.ac.uk/fdag/uaua.htm.

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