

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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## PERFORMANCE & SPACE II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2024 CONFERENCE

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**Singing, Space, Focus Live Singing as a  
Concentration Tool and a Definition Factor for  
Spatial Conditions in Site-Based performances**

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**22****Singing, Space, Focus Live  
Singing as a Concentration Tool and a Definition Factor  
for Spatial Conditions in Site-Based performances**

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**Abstract**

Singing and sound have long been essential tools in site-based performances, transforming spaces and enhancing emotional connections. This paper explores how singing shapes spatial experiences, focusing on its role in emotional engagement, thematic reinforcement, and atmosphere creation. Drawing on theories of space, memory, and sound, it discusses how soundscapes influence perceptions of space and community. Through case studies like *The MotherWound* and *Pleno*, I demonstrate how music activates spaces, creating immersive, resonant experiences for audiences.

**Keywords:** site-based performance, soundscapes, emotional engagement, thematic reinforcement

**Singing, Space, Focus Live**

Site-based performances often rely on sensory stimuli to create a memorable and immersive experience. In particular, sound—specifically live singing—can evoke powerful emotional responses, shaping the spatial experience for both performers and audiences. As Simon Emmerson (2008) states, “Space is not simply a geometric ‘thing out there’ (...). Space would not be perceptible without objects, textures, sounds.” This paper explores how singing contributes to the perception of space in performances by fostering emotional engagement, reinforcing thematic elements, and shaping the atmosphere.

**Space, Memory, and Sound**

Anthropological studies of space and place highlight the importance of sound in shaping cultural meaning and memory. Spaces are imbued with social meanings that can be

contested or reinforced through performances. Edward Schieffelin (1985) argues that performance constructs meanings in a social space, rather than a cognitive one. In the Kaluli healing seances, for example, singing fosters unity and emotional involvement. This idea aligns with R. Murray Schafer's (1994) concept of the *soundscape*, a framework through which sound shapes both aesthetic and cultural understanding of a space.

### **Emotional Engagement through Singing**

Singing in a performance can evoke specific emotions, creating a deeper connection between the audience and the environment. Musicologists such as Lazarus (1991) suggest that emotions are profoundly shaped by environmental factors, including sound. In the performances discussed below, music not only connected audiences to the narrative but also heightened their emotional involvement, reinforcing the sense of being present within the space.

#### **Case Study: *The MotherWound***

In the performance *The MotherWound*, I explored themes of trauma, memory, and motherhood by incorporating Greek songs associated with immigrant nostalgia. Set in an intimate, acoustically resonant space, I embroidered handkerchiefs while singing songs tied to Greek immigrants' experiences in Germany. The physical act of embroidery, traditionally considered a "female job," combined with live singing, resonated deeply with the audience, even when they did not share the cultural context. This demonstrates how sound can transcend linguistic barriers and evoke emotions rooted in personal or collective memories.

#### **Case Study: *Pleno***

*Pleno* was set in Thessaloniki, where I sang traditional and contemporary *laïkó* songs<sup>1</sup> during a performance centred on the city's shifting identity. By incorporating soundscapes reflective of Thessaloniki's multi-ethnic history, the performance illustrated how space, sound, and memory intertwine. Through repetitive actions and familiar songs, the audience connected with the city's cultural narrative, despite its complexities. The combination of live singing and soundscapes evoked a sense of nostalgia and unity among the viewers, making the performance both a personal and collective experience.

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<sup>1</sup> *Laïkó* (Greek: λαϊκό) is a genre of popular Greek music that evolved in the mid-20th century from earlier urban styles such as *rebetiko*. It is associated with working-class culture and typically combines traditional melodic structures with modern instrumentation, expressing themes of love, sorrow, and everyday life (Holst-Warhaft, 1975; Dawe, 2007).

## Conclusion

Incorporating songs into site-based performances enhances emotional engagement, reinforces thematic elements, and shapes the overall atmosphere. As demonstrated in *The MotherWound* and *Pleno*, singing can activate spaces in ways that resonate deeply with audiences, creating a multi-sensory experience. By blending sound with spatial and thematic elements, performers can craft immersive, emotionally charged environments that linger in the audience's memory long after the performance ends.

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