

INTRODUCTION

*Each place has a voice.
Sending a voice, a voice responds.*

The search for the sacred has existed in every culture since the dawn of time. The building of holy places is part of what makes us human. But what is it, exactly, that makes a place sacred? One answer would be to say that a sacred space is a natural or created place where spiritual experiences are enhanced and ritual acts of worship are performed. Religions call certain places sacred because of important events that have taken place there. Christians revere Mount Golgotha where Jesus was crucified. Buddhists consider the Bo tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment as holy. Muslims go on pilgrimage to Mecca. But places do not have to be named as holy by the culture in order to be sacred. We may have a private place, special only to us, where it is meaningful to pray or meditate.

A sacred space is a *temenos*, a Greek word meaning an enclosure that makes it possible to enter into a relationship with a greater reality. Entering into sacred space, one crosses a threshold and moves from *chronos*, human time and space, into *kairos*, eternal time.

There are places on the earth, often where ley lines and underground water streams converge, that emanate powerful vibrations. These vibrations alter our sense of ordinary reality and put us in contact with the numinous—with mythic reality and the greater mysteries that cannot be named. Early people the world over revered such places, be they mountains, caves, rocks, or forests. Later, sacred structures were built on these spots, aligned with the stars and constellations to protect, contain, and amplify the mysterious earth energies.

Such sacred places are inherently musical. They are places where we go to attune and be tuned, to be in harmony with holy realms. Early humans sought out natural places for their acoustic properties. They found resonant caves, echo canyons, and other places where sound reverberated in mysterious ways. Later, one might say that “music” was literally built into temples and churches in the form of sacred geometry. They were not only visual masterpieces but acoustic masterpieces as well. From the Taj Mahal to the Great Pyramid of Giza to soaring Gothic Cathedrals, these places sing!

The truth of that phenomenon awes me, for singing has always been as important to me as the air I breathe. My mother said I sang before I talked. I was fed by her lullabies. The feeling of being safely wrapped in a blanket of song was my first experience of sacred space. Held in my mother’s embrace, I could hear her voice hum through me. As she sang “Somewhere over the Rainbow,” I imagined the rainbow bridge and felt I would go there someday.

Since childhood, I have been sensitive to psychic undercurrents and the intersection among song, dreams, and spirit. I feel these currents as vibrational realities, poetic sound threads that weave the world together. Sometimes I have had big dreams I know I must

follow. At one point music became *MUSIC*, an archetype that has led me to my life's path as a music therapist, voice teacher, and healer. For over twenty-five years I have explored music's effects on consciousness, helped people find their voices, and taught university classes in archetypal psychology and the healing power of sound and song. My experience of working in psychiatric hospitals, homeless shelters, recovery programs, senior centers, special education schools, and my own private practice has brought me to one constant: music's ability to move people deeply and open the soul's inner landscape.

Sound is primary in forming consciousness. Igor Reznikoff, a specialist in early music, antiquity, and the resonance of sacred sites, believes that deep consciousness is mostly structured through sound, as is our first notion of space. Sound is always there, imprinting and inspiring us. Sound matters. As humans we are sound beings, highly sensitive acoustic soundboards. Sound is woven into the marrow of our bones.

It is also woven into the space all around us. When we sing we change the molecules in the atmosphere and set them vibrating. Bernice Johnson Reagon of the a cappella singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock talks about how activists used song in the civil rights movement to claim the air. Whenever a policeman came into a meeting to intimidate those gathered there, someone would start singing. Even the policeman couldn't help tapping his feet along with the beat.

When sound is set into motion, it expands like a balloon. As the balloon gets bigger, the acoustic energy at any point on it diminishes by the square root of its change in size, a principle known as the inverse square law. Accordingly, sound never really dies. An aura of inaudible sound permeates our world. Everything—every word ever spoken, every song ever sung, every prayer ever uttered—is still in the air.

Since the beginning of human experience, we have encircled the earth with painted caves, cathedrals, stupas, oracle chambers, shrines, kivas, megalithic monuments, pyramids, and other buildings to celebrate and give praise to the Divine. We have created these places to hear ourselves and Spirit more clearly, to create relationship with the seen and the unseen worlds.

While we can't really know if the ancients used acoustics intentionally in the design of sacred sites, I believe knowledge of resonance was passed down from the oral cultures of the Paleolithic and the Neolithic and straight to the door of Chartres. From voice to voice, ear to ear, heart to heart, this understanding was transferred from generation to generation, as if in an ancient game of telephone. I believe that early people *noticed* when something vibrated in their landscape and then built their structures to enhance these effects. Singing in caves and canyons, they heard echoes and later built sacred architecture to enshrine the air. I believe that early shamans were sound technicians who knew how to manipulate sound and space to create portals into other dimensions. Can I prove this? No. But even eating breakfast on my back porch talking to my cat I can

hear his name reverberate from the portal. There is a moment of awe. “Boogie” has become *Boogie*, not just a name but a word filled with magic.

In 1995 I had a vision that led me on a journey to explore such acoustic mysteries. I saw myself deep in a crypt inside a French cathedral. A medieval knight and lady were entombed, resting side by side. I moved closer to them, holding a glowing torch in my hand. The lady sprang to life. “Follow the Lady of Roses. Follow her music,” she said. I heard the words *langue d’oc* before the vision faded.

I knew I must go to France. In 1996 I was finally able to begin my pilgrimage. Before my trip I read that troubadours once sang to the Lady in the *langue d’oc*, a regional language in Southern France. Was this her music? I read fascinating stories about Black Madonnas, Mary Magdalene, the Knights Templar, and the Cathars. When I asked who the Lady of Roses might be, I received many answers. Some said that she was the Virgin Mary and that I would find her at Lourdes. In New Mexico, where I live, friends pointed me to the Virgin of Guadalupe who appeared to a peasant man, Juan Diego, in Mexico in 1534. When the priest doubted his vision, Juan Diego took off his coat, from which—in the dead of winter—live roses cascaded to the floor. Inside his cloak a picture of the Virgin was imprinted.

Others told me that the Lady of Roses was the Black Madonna and that I would find her throughout France and in the crypt of Chartres Cathedral. I knew I had to go there and sing.

Before going to France I attended the Voices of Heaven and Earth Conference in Findhorn, Scotland. There three hundred people sang from all over the world. I sang hallelujahs with Ysaye Barnwell from the group Sweet Honey in the Rock and was immersed in an ocean of sound with Susan Osborn. I sang overtones with Iegor Reznikoff. I listened to Don Campbell’s personal healing voyage through toning, chanted Vedic hymns, and sang Taize chants in the moonlight. In the air were Japanese, French, Spanish, British, and German accents. Hearing the lilt of Scottish voices, the wind from the North Sea, the song from the flowers in the garden, I realized that the voice itself is a cathedral. We are all sound chambers resonating with the One Song, heard in different variations, timbres, and rhythms. Each unique, but part of the whole, we make up the chorus of life.

After the conference I visited France. As I stood in the center of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral and heard my voice resound from the nave, I knew I needed to write this book. After Chartres I went to Lascaux. There my voice reflected off the cave walls in the Gallery of the Bulls.

Each of these experiences taught me something about space and sound. I experience sacred sites as amplifiers of consciousness. Singing brings a holy place into vibration, as if it were a tuning fork being struck. In these journeys the tuning fork was also my body, set into motion in a new way. I discovered that the ancients built their temples according to ratios of sacred geometry, universal principles that exist in numbers, shapes, and musical intervals and in the proportions that compose our bodies.

When I returned to New Mexico I was assaulted by the sounds of Interstate Highway 40 in Albuquerque, the buzz of bulldozers, the rush of traffic, and the general static of life in the fast lane. In spite of a drought, a community in the East Mountains was putting in a water pipeline to build a golf course. That irony seemed symbolic of values gone awry on many levels. I remembered Iegor Reznikoff asking, “What kind of churches are we building now? Where are the songs? Where is the painted glass?”²

During the ten years I have spent writing this book, the terrain of sacred space and sound has taken up residence within me. I read about sacred sites and searched out reverberant spaces to sing, from red rock canyons and crevices in trees to shrine rooms inside New Mexico stupas. I listened to stories of people who sang during their own pilgrimages. As I read I noticed that most books on sacred architecture were visually oriented. Rarely did I find more than a few paragraphs relating to the acoustic properties of sacred space. Yet singing has always been essential to culture and is the earliest form of musical expression, a fundamental human need.

On my quest, I have learned how different religions have created buildings that most suited their message. Cavernous stone cathedrals with their incredible reverberation were perfect for Gregorian chant. In Protestant religions, which emphasize speech over music, small chapels with elevated pulpits were built so the minister’s sermon could best be heard. The cloth hangings, silk paintings, and wooden ceilings in Tibetan temples “restrict reverberation and produce a high clear sound.”³ This arrangement is ideal for the sounds of horns, drums, and cymbals that punctuate the chanting of Buddhist monks. Pueblo kivas in New Mexico, built of adobe bricks, create a womblike space in the earth that enhances the experience of intimacy.

Questions about religion are in my blood. My eleventh great grandfather was William Brewster, the founder of the Pilgrim Church. Other ancestors of mine also sailed on the Mayflower to escape religious persecution in England. My great-great grandparents were early Mormons who followed Joseph Smith. My great-great grandmother walked alongside a wagon train from Illinois to Utah. Eventually, she and her husband settled a small Arizona town and named it Eden. Later, my father broke from his Mormon tradition when he married my mother and became a Presbyterian. He requested excommunication from the Mormon Church and was happy with his choice.

The group of seekers, rebels, and pioneers from whom I am descended have been ready to cross oceans or walk in the wilderness for their beliefs. While my search has led to different conclusions, this striving to find a new path outside of traditional religions is my legacy. Interfaith services and the mystic undercurrents rippling beneath orthodox religions have always drawn me, for I believe there are many paths, each streaming toward a larger source. I honor the uniqueness of each while searching for the threads that unite us all.

Music is one of those threads, our common language for matters of the spirit. I found sound practices variously within the Jewish, Islamic, Christian, and Hindu traditions. Some that most impressed

me fall outside the mainstream, because of my particular interest in the feminine. My search has led me to people, places, and books that have expanded my understanding of the sacred. With the Dominican scholar Matthew Fox, I believe that “there can be no global peace and justice without global spirituality.”⁴

This book is in the service of that belief. It is intended as a song journey to explore the sound mysteries at many of the world’s holy places. We will also explore the blueprint of human development and how we become music in the womb. And we will discover the miracles of the ear, an organ that never sleeps.

The book moves sequentially through time, from Paleolithic caves to Neolithic passage graves, the first sacred architecture where acoustic conjuring was done. We will follow pilgrimage routes, well worn with the song prayers of pilgrims, both ancient and modern. We’ll enter the King’s Chamber in the Great Pyramid and go into temples, chapels, and cathedrals to discover how music is integral to the life journey and how each faith consecrates space with sound.

The book continues to our present time where dissonance reigns. The final chapters reflect a return to the temple, where people are seeking resonant places to sing and are building new sacred sites out of breath, song, love, vision, and intention.

Along the way, I share my own experiences in singing at sacred sites in New Mexico and during several trips to the United Kingdom and to Egypt. I recount my talks with singers, sound healers, voice teachers, poets, acoustic engineers, acoustic archaeologists, Egyptologists, rabbis, Native Americans, and seers. My intention has been to weave a web of connections among the feminine, religion, science, dreams, visions, myth, history, music, and my own story. My hope is that I have achieved a harmonic resolution in which the reader may enjoy fresh insight about the human need for sacred proportions in architecture and music. Now, more than ever, people are searching for new ways to pray, to experience the Divine, and to relate to life’s highest mysteries. This book explores the acoustics of sacred space as one avenue for understanding. It is about, not just ordinary music, but music with the power to transform us into a greater reality.