

Multi-Voicing Spatial Songs

—How do we work with sound in space

This anthology is one outcome of *Voicing Spatial Songs*, an artistic research project hosted by RMC (Rhythmic Music Conservatory) conducted by Sharin and Louise Foo (aka SØSTR). Over the course of two years, we have shifted from writing and performing music in stereo to exploring a new spatial aesthetic.

We've been “going spatial”, as Laurie Anderson and Dr. Edgar Choueiri put it in their 2021 article of that title. They argue that space in music creation (spatial audio) is emerging as an element we must learn to understand almost from scratch:

“The spatial ‘color’ has largely been missing from the composer’s palette... It is as if the color red were always missing from the painter’s palette for purely technical reasons ... Consequently, all paintings in our museums lack a hue of red, and we have grown accustomed to this incongruence between nature and art.”

Anderson & Choueiri

sound actively, beginning in the 1950s. In his 1972 lecture *Four Criteria of Electronic Music*, he argued that space is a composable dimension, as essential as pitch or timbre. His practice involved organising multiple independent sound layers that move through space, each with its own trajectory, texture, and timing – laying crucial groundwork for what is now expanding.

What is new today – and what lets us discover those “uses of the color red” – is the growing accessibility of spatial-sound technologies. Tools once confined to research labs or elite studios are reaching a wider range of artists and communities. And at the same time, no setup is truly “plug-and-play” and moving between speaker configurations often demands intricate adjustments.

As the title *Multi-Voicing Spatial Songs* suggests, this anthology explores the relationship between space and music – and does so through a multiplicity of approaches. In this context, “songs” are not confined to “short poems or lyrics set to music,” but expands

into a much broader scope of approaches to sound, including practices within performing arts, sound art, popular music, artistic research and even astrophysics.

The word “voicing” carries a double meaning: musically, it refers to how harmony is constructed – how the same notes, arranged differently, can result in radically different sonic outcomes, so with “voicing” referring to method, approach, and process, we emphasise and celebrate the differences in artistic practice. The second meaning relates to voice as expression, agency, and opinion – reflecting on, and engaging in, dialogue about music and sound in relation to space, and the communities that emerge through those conversations. Our research has not only transformed our own practice in SØSTR, but has also sparked a curiosity to connect with others exploring spatial sound, since it has become clear to us that there are as many ways to work with spatial sound as there are practitioners.

We’re excited to bring together a wide range of voicings: strategies and approaches to spatial sound creation from eleven artistic practices (20 individual artists). The scope of our curation was shaped by the local spatial sound practices we encountered throughout our research, as well as by the availability of practitioners.

We find it both intriguing and thought-provoking that we can’t present the actual sounds discussed in this publication. The nature of many of these works – site-specific, immersive, multi-channel, or technically complex – make them difficult to document or share. This raises questions about how spatial sound can be preserved, communicated, and distributed in the future. What will the archive of spatial works look like? How might we imagine ways to share experiences that are inherently non-reducible to stereo or text?

Alongside the technical shift is a cultural one – in which we hope to see a growing emphasis on sharing ideas, methods, and conceptual approaches, not just final works. This spirit of openness, dialogue, and collective exploration is central to how spatial sound practices could be evolving.

We hope that this publication (and the Spatial Strategies deck) even without the sounds themselves, can activate your imagination – and perhaps inspire new inner sound worlds. Our aim is not only to document, but to invite further dialogue, exchange, and experimentation.

Enjoy the different voices!

Sharin & Louise (aka SØSTR)