

WELCOME TO POLYPHONY

This exhibition presents the dialogue within my practice between voice(s), place, presence, and performance. It explores how I have taken inspiration from historical vocal forms, particularly concepts around 'polyphony' - the combining of 'poly' (many) 'phony' (voices) - into my interdisciplinary practice over the last few years.

I have enjoyed taking part in performances of early music (medieval, renaissance and Tudor vocal music) including Tallis and the 'polychoral' (multiple choir) spatial works of Monteverdi. But in my own work, it is the small-scale intimate manifestations of polyphony, such as Hildegard von Bingen (d.1179), Pérotin (d. 1230), Guillaume de Machaut (d. 1377), Carlo Gesualdo (d.1613), William Byrd (d. 1623), and John Dowland (d.1626), which particularly attracts me in practice, for both artistic and practical reasons. Why wait to gather a huge choir to compose for when you have a handful of friends who are willing to vocally experiment with you? This also generates friendships around vocal practice, which I have hugely valued and which I hope will shine through in this exhibition.

You will see that these are not high budget works, in fact it is essential to their intimate nature is that these are works created through mutual support and shared vocal endeavour. These were performances with a small p – they were not aimed at making a large spectacle, but at being an intimate form of vocal community, extended to all those who have come to be immersed in these often spatial works, and joined our shared listening.

This exhibition is an experiment to see what happens when each work is seen as a 'voice', which when sharing a space, becomes one of 'many voices' (poly-phony). This exhibition of combined voices draws works together in proximity for the first time, allowing them to speak to each other; to speak for - and between - themselves. It illustrates and further tests my theory that, whether recorded or in a video, we can never seem to truly separate technically 'disembodied' voices from human presence. We project human presence before rational thought can stop us – we can always seem to 'hear a person' in a recorded voice. This is why recorded voices can feel so uncanny, and so haunting.

I invite you the visitor to join me in celebrating what has become an affectionate ode and retrospective, to the endurance, grace, and timelessness of voices sounding together, through time, and through space.

Thanks to all involved, from the bottom of my heart.
Ellen

Message from one of the singers, Fiona McAlister:

"Your show looks amazing, Ellen. I'm so glad you're still working and developing and finding places to showcase it.

Yes, I have photos of us on FB and in my phone which I happen upon from time to time, and of course some of our performances in my iPod which I always thrill to listen to. Very good times indeed. The best."

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