

# The Shape of Ritual

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Artist in Residence 2016



Fritz Wotruba, Fritz Mayr, The Church of the Most Holy Trinity, "Wotruba Church," completed in 1976, Vienna, detail, photo: Evy Jokhova

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Evy Jokhova, *The Shape of the Ritual*, 2017, video still, © Evy Jokhova, still: Ulrich A. Reiterer

*"The Shape of the Ritual*  
is a research exploring the relationship  
between sound, architecture  
and the body." **Evy Jokhova**

With an initial reference to "Architecture Becomes Music," an article by Charles Jencks discussing the relationship between architecture, music and Pythagorean mathematical principles as a theoretical premise for harmony in music and architecture, the aim of this project is to transcribe three selected ceremonial buildings (representing Classical, Gothic and Modernist architecture) into music and compare them observing how the mathematical principles that inform their architecture manifest (or do not manifest) in their musical renditions. The buildings are: the Florence Baptistery, Italy, the chapel in the House of St Barnabas,<sup>1</sup> London, and the "Wotruba Church,"<sup>2</sup> Vienna. All three buildings were designed for music to be performed inside and each musical transcription will be played back within the buildings themselves accompanied by a performative or sculptural intervention. Walter Pater (1877) proposed that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."<sup>3</sup> Charles Jencks (2013) suggests that this drive is backed by an understanding that in abstract music form and content (sound and sense) are one integrated thing; something that modernism and modernist art strive towards.

The interest of the research lies in the possibilities of this fusing of form and content, its permutations, disruptions and reconfigurations on the basis of architecture and its influence on the individual. The project aims to examine the relationship between sound, body and form on the premise of architecture as *frozen music*; rhythm, proportion, harmony; and the concept of a cosmic code – the idea that music and architecture are generated by the same underlying code.

<sup>1</sup> Gothic Revival chapel in central London built between 1862–1864 by Joseph Clarke, a Fellow at the Royal Institute of British Architects and a British Gothic Revival architect. The chapel was designed in with reference to the style of Anglo-Catholic revival and includes stylistic details from medieval Gothic architecture, as well as draws on the plans of a Romanesque chapel at the Abbey of Montmajour in Arles.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Pater, quoted in Charles Jencks, "Architecture becomes Music," in *Architecture Review* (6 May 2013), <https://www.architectural-review.com/rethink/viewpoints/architecture-becomes-music/8647050>, article (accessed May 12, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The Wotruba Church (completed in 1976) is a building composed of 152 irregularly stacked cement slabs on the outskirts of Vienna, Austria designed on the premise of a plaster model made by sculptor Fritz Wotruba. In a sense it is an enlarged non-symmetrical abstract sculpture that allows the audience to enter into an art form that would otherwise be viewed only from the outside and on a smaller scale. Reference: Nachlass Fritz Wotruba (Fritz Wotruba's Estate), Belvedere Wien, Fritz Wotruba Privatstiftung.

It is an investigation into how architecture is understood, embodied and experienced. Academics in the fields of architecture and music often refer to the idea that music and architecture are generated by the same mathematical principles and have a cosmic connection.<sup>4</sup> This idea, translated by Pythagoras into mathematics and geometry, was the basis for the Ancient Greek preoccupation with proportion. Geometrical ratios joined music with ceremonial architecture.<sup>5</sup> Their columns and intercolumniations created steady beats of solid/void that mimicked staccato composition.<sup>6</sup> Similar to columns of the Greek temple, pillars or tall stained glass windows of a Gothic church, provide for stark contrasts and acute understating of sound and form through dark/light and loud/quiet.

Religious buildings pose the ultimate challenge in handling form and function for an architect. Whereas two of the selected sites fully adhere to classical principles of architecture: the Florence Baptistery, a minor octagonal Basilica built in the Florentine Romanesque style between 1059–1128, and the chapel at the House of St Barnabas, a Gothic Revival chapel built between 1862–1864 by Joseph Clarke in central London; the third – Church of the Most Holy Trinity – is a Brutalist church composed of 152 irregularly stacked cement slabs on the outskirts of Vienna, Austria. The Church of the Most Holy Trinity designed by the Austrian sculptor Fritz Wotruba is widely known as the “Wotruba Church”. Fritz Wotruba was an artist, not an architect, and the building was designed on the premise of a plaster model, consequently the building goes against all architectural principles, or at least was conceived without any consideration for them. In a sense, it is an enlarged non-symmetrical abstract sculpture that allows the audience to enter into an art form that would otherwise be viewed only from the outside and on a smaller scale. Completed in 1976, the “Wotruba Church” was the result of a nine year collaboration between Fritz Wotruba and architect Fritz Mayr.

The research considers the relationship between presentation, ritual and experience of both architecture and music. Driven by the mathematics behind art, music and architecture, the output of each part of the project is directly informed by the ratios and algorithms used to construct sound compositions and buildings. With reference to the architectural plans, models and the buildings themselves, the architecture of each building is systematized through drawing and re-presented as a linear sequence to be interpreted for musical notation. The visual scores are handed over to musician James Metcalfe who transcribes them into music using the embedded code and a prescribed timeframe. The timeframe in each case corresponds to the length of time necessary to circle the building once inside and once inside at a consistent slow walking pace. The “architectural music” is then re-rendered into performances that translate sound into movement or sculptures that have the potential to alter the acoustic properties of space. The cyclical motion of translation is an important part of this research: how one form of language can become another, and then yet another; how sculpture can become architecture, then music, then dance or functional sculpture.

This research based project sits between curatorial and artistic practice, utilizing archival materials, art history and collaborative practice as research tools. The transcription of the buildings into music, sculpture and choreographed performance is a continuation of research into this collaborative process and the theoretic premise of trans-disciplinary practice.

<sup>4</sup> See Ayla Lepine, “Architecture does not teach us what the sacred is, but it may touch it and draw others to it”, in *The Architectural Review* (25 March 2016), <https://www.architectural-review.com/today/architecture-does-not-teach-us-what-the-sacred-is-but-it-may-touch-it-and-draw-others-to-it/10004570>, article (accessed March 25, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Staccato composition is a form of musical articulation, which is determined in modern notation by notes of a shortened duration, played very separately from others and/or followed by silence.

<sup>5</sup> “Ratios such as 1:1 (a sound repeating itself, or the architecture of a square room), and 2:1 (the octave, a string doubled or halved in length, or in building the double-square front of a temple).” Charles Jencks, “Architecture becomes Music,” in *Architecture Review* (6 May 2013), <https://www.architectural-review.com/rethink/viewpoints/architecture-becomes-music/8647050>, article (accessed May 12, 2016).



Evy Jokhova, *The Shape of Ritual*, 2016, installation view, das weisse haus, Hegelgasse 14, 2016



Evy Jokhova, *Wotruba Score. Melodies and Blueprint*, 2016, detail, installation view, das weisse haus, Hegelgasse 14