

Resonant Presence Act I

Sound, Body, and Architectural Encounter

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Introduction

A musical note offers a way to attend to architecture as an event unfolding in time. Listening continues after the player's gesture has ended, following the sound into a room whose distances and surfaces might otherwise remain at the edge of attention. Resonant Presence asks how live music, poetry, storytelling, and silence can make the bodily experience of architecture available to reflection. Its first act, Sound, Body, and Architectural Encounter, brings my architectural inquiry into conversation with my own music-making. The purpose is to explore how the act of listening participates in our sense of being somewhere.

Conceived for the Church of St. John the Evangelist, known as Red Roof Church, Montréal, this is the first of two linked contemplative workshops on successive Salon mornings. Each offers a complete encounter and can be attended independently. Act I concentrates on presence within the space; Act II turns toward narrative and memory. Together they respond to the Salon's concern with embodied encounters in the city while proposing a practice of architectural attention that can be reconsidered in other settings.

Listening as architectural attention

Juhani Pallasmaa understands architecture through the relationship between embodied existence, place, and time. His criticism of visual dominance does not require abandoning sight: he also describes vision's capacity to engage the other senses.¹ This project develops that relational approach through listening alongside light, posture, movement, and proximity. Sound becomes an invitation to notice where one is situated, rather than a substitute for looking.

The instrument matters through its timbre, the player's touch, and the duration and articulation of musical phrases. I will allow the room's audible response to inform pacing, pauses, and intensity. This reciprocal adjustment is the practical basis of the workshop's responsiveness to its site. Participants are invited to notice a sound's beginning and fading, the distance between themselves and its source, and the return of environmental sounds during a pause. Such observations need neither specialist musical knowledge nor a single correct interpretation.

A historically situated encounter

The church is more than an acoustic setting. It was built in 1877-1878, with William Tutin Thomas as architect, and its Gothic Revival design was planned for ritual use.² Montréal's heritage assessment identifies the building's contrasts of light and interior polychromy, and relates its spatial character to the Anglo-Catholic tradition.³ These conditions give the encounter a historical specificity that cannot be reduced to the sensation of reverberation.

The workshop enters a religious place with meanings that precede the gathering. Participation does not require religious assent, but neither does the invitation make the church a neutral

¹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2024), 11, 20, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394200702>.

² Church of St. John the Evangelist, "Our Building," sections "Bricks & Mortar I" and "Bricks & Mortar III," accessed September 6, 2026, <https://www.redroof.ca/our-building>.

³ Ville de Montréal, *Site de l'église Saint John the Evangelist, 137, avenue du Président-Kennedy: Énoncé de l'intérêt patrimonial* (May 2022), 10-11.

backdrop. Attention to light, enclosure, and sound is held together with recognition of the church's continuing religious use. A visitor may experience stillness or wonder without sharing the meanings these conditions hold for a worshipper. This difference belongs within the inquiry.

Music and words in the room

Music, poems, and stories will be selected in relation to one another, drawing on the traditions and repertoire through which I develop the performance. A story may introduce a musical passage; the cadence of a poem may draw attention to the room's response to the speaking voice. Their relationship will be made explicit through brief contextual introductions, with authors and translators identified where applicable. The aim is a situated offering, rather than a survey in which different traditions become interchangeable signs of spirituality.

The encounter begins by listening to the space before adding music. Short passages of playing and spoken language alternate with silence, allowing the architecture and the gathering to remain perceptible. Invitations will be few and concrete: notice where a sound seems to come from, how light helps orient the body in the room, or what becomes audible when the playing stops. Participants may remain seated, attend without speaking, or step out when needed. No prescribed breathing, movement, or emotional response is required. Listening itself is the principal form of participation.

Presence as an open question

Here, presence describes attending to one's situation among other people and material surroundings. It does not name an achievement that the performance guarantees. Likewise, acoustic resonance and a felt sense of connection are related questions, not equivalent phenomena. A moving passage, a long reverberation, or a shared silence cannot by itself establish that an experience is sacred. Participants remain free to understand the encounter through their own beliefs, associations, and uncertainties.

The architectural contribution is a practice of reciprocal attention: the player responds to the room, while participants explore how that response makes aspects of the room noticeable. Its value lies in making this relationship available to experience and description. Beyond the church, the same question can accompany an ordinary encounter with a stairwell, a public room, or a street: how does listening affect the way we inhabit a place? Act I leaves that question open, with space for the experience to continue without requiring an explanation at its close.