



Singing Windows, a Prosper Adventure

“This project made a difference to Northdown Road” – project partner

1. Introduction and the Process

1.1 *Singing Windows* was a sound installation by Robert Jarvis that took place at 15 locations in Broadstairs, Cliftonville and Margate, in Thanet, Kent. It combined Feonic technology with edited recordings of birdsongs in an attempt to change how each hosting location felt to its users. The installation was in place from July 2013 until 18 January 2014 in Broadstairs and Margate, and from November 2013 to January 2014 in Cliftonville. *Singing Windows* aimed to test how the creative use of audio could affect place and people’s perception of place. The installation also travelled to other towns across the county (Canterbury, Faversham, Herne Bay and Rochester); however, this evaluation document is only for those locations in Thanet listed above (Broadstairs, Cliftonville and Margate).

1.2 The project received the majority of its funding from Canterbury Festival's *Prosper* initiative, with additional support from Feonic, Margate Task Force, Thanet District Council and the town teams connected with each location, and was actually a follow-up to an experimental pilot project that took place in Margate between November 2012 and March 2013. This earlier experiment stage, carried out in collaboration with retailers on Margate high street, was attributed with a series of beneficial effects, some expected and some not. These included:

- (i) the street being perceived as having a more cheery atmosphere;
- (ii) an increase in visitors to the participating retailers;
- (iii) an increase in sales in those shops where the point-of-sale was towards the rear of the shop;
- (iv) an increase in public curiosity;
- (v) a reported decrease in anti-social behaviour.

1.3 One of the purposes of the follow-up project then (and therefore this evaluation) was to investigate these positive social effects that the initial Margate experiment had identified, specifically:

- (i) to find out if the reported effects generated by the experimental pilot stage might be replicable in other locations;
- (ii) to gain a better understanding of the elements that might be instrumental in achieving those effects;
- (iii) to learn about how work such as this, affects how people feel about place.

1.4 The following retailers took part:

In Margate	In Broadstairs	In Cliftonville
The Vincent Cottage Company	Boho Rap	The Christian Bookshop
The Secret Wardrobe	Rooks the Butchers	Pick n Paint a Pot
Terry's Gifts*	Sweet Yesterdays	Thanet Quality Foods
Lilly's by the Sea	Flowers by SP	The Secret Garden
Glitz and Gadgets		
Petals Florist		
SJ Shoe Repairs		

* also took part in experimental pilot project

1.5 It is interesting to note that the retailers had a varied customer base and sold different products. As well as this, the footfall for each shop varied vastly depending on the nature of the shop as well as its location (for example, whether there was parking nearby, or whether premises were situated on a main road, and so on). In some instances footfall was between 0-15 customers per day and in most cases the footfall was either between 16-30 or 31-45 customers per day; one shop receives over 600 customers per day. Shops ranged from 'browsing' shops to others where customers would visit with a clear intention to make a purchase, e.g. a butchers.

1.6 We were keen to investigate the positive social effects that the *experiment* stage identified and present this information using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach enabled us to present statistically reliable information obtained from factual measurement, supported and enhanced by meaning, motivation and feelings. We also wanted to create room for experimenting and the opportunity to 'see what happens'.

1.7 Ultimately, *Singing Windows* was devised to explore how the installation's use of birdsong might be used to raise curiosity, and how sound could be utilised to help make the high street and shops feel cheerier. We were keen to find out if the installation encouraged people to engage with the retailers and potentially encourage new conversations related to the sound art. In places where the installation had been previously, the increased interaction between customers and shop staff had also included a reported increase in sales, and so we were interested to see if this was replicated too. Finally, we were interested to note how people physically responded to the installation and to document this through the use of Labanotation: a system devised by Rudolf Laban, for recording and analysing human movement.

2. Enterprise, Business Benefits and Relationship Building (linking to an increase in visitors to the participating retailers and any increase in sales).

“Anything that’s different and quirky in the high street is a good thing” Margate Retailer

- 2.1 (During the previous pilot experiment, some retailers indicated that sales and footfall had increased. One retailer stated that his sales had increased up to a reported 10%. The installation also provided an alternative conversation piece, enabling retailers to connect with potential customers.)
- 2.2 We talked to the retailers before the work was installed and again after the installation was taken down. This helped us to gauge the environment before and after the installation had been in place. To help us measure this, all the retailers were also invited to complete pre and post questionnaires* (APPENDIX, Example 1). These questionnaire used structured questions (a standard method where specific answers are anticipated). The data gathered from the questionnaires helped us to gauge if any change had occurred. In addition to these questionnaires, we visited the retailers during the installation and also after the installation was taken down for qualitative conversations about the installation. The interviews were recorded and the findings have influenced this report.

* Two retailers were unable to complete the end point questionnaire.

What did we Discover?

“It definitely drew attention” – Margate Retailer

- 2.3 In our discussions with the retailers, all, without exception, agreed that the installation was a conversation starter, that it was a good idea, and that they would like to have something similar again. The installation's use of birdsong started conversations on all levels in terms of engaging with existing customers and it also encouraged new customers into shops. It was noted that on at least 50% of occasions, new customers entered the shop who wouldn't normally have stepped inside the door. One retailer in Broadstairs thought that this was very important as the new interest helped her to establish her business. In her experience, customers had commented that they didn't know about the shop and would return.
- 2.4 In some instances it was noted that new customers came in to the shop to enquire about the bird sound used by the installation, and then, whilst in the shop, had made purchases. We can link these purchases directly to the installation being in place as stated by the retailer's experience. In 50% of cases customers asked if they could buy the actual sound installation.

- 2.5 In terms of the written quantitative pre and post questions undertaken with the retailers, it was generally noted that things had stayed the same and that the installation had not significantly changed quantifiable outcomes. However, in most cases this does not correspond with the qualitative conversations that happened with shopkeepers and the quantitative data collected. For example, during the conversations (and in most cases), shopkeepers reported an increase in conversations with customers and, in particular, new customers. It also transpired that new customers had also visited the shops because of the installation; however, the majority of the shopkeepers marked on their questionnaires that their footfall had stayed the same. If, as they did in some cases, stated that the footfall had decreased or increased, then this was attributed to seasonal influences. So, although retailers had indicated an increase in footfall during their conversations with us, it did not seem to be definitive enough for them to note on their questionnaire, but was confirmed through further discussion. Similarly, the actual length of the conversations with customers appeared to stay the same for the quantitative responses, although increases were highlighted through our qualitative conversations. In some cases, the retailers indicated that they had experienced an increase in sales, although they were reluctant or unable to associate this in terms of quantifiable data, i.e. a percentage increase. This demonstrates to us, that it is important to have a balance of both quantitative and qualitative approaches and methods of data collection that provides opportunities for further discussion and exploration.

3. Public Appreciation, Curiosity, Happiness and Well Being – this is linked to an increase in public curiosity and the street being perceived as having a more cheery atmosphere.

“The majority of people found it intriguing” – Cliftonville Retailer

- 3.1 (According to feedback during the experimental pilot project both retailers and the general public stated that the high street was a more ‘cheery’ place.)
- 3.2 A self completion questionnaire (APPENDIX, Example 2) was designed for customers to complete and leave with the shopkeepers; and blank questionnaires were left at each shop. This questionnaire used structured questions, semi structured (specific answers required with space for ‘free response’) and open reflective questions (to encourage reflection and writing down of thoughts). To help gauge their curiosity, we also left a batch of numbered *Singing Windows* postcards at each shop as well. The postcards gave a little more information about the installation and also included the project website address so people, if they wished, could find out more. This was one way of helping us to measure how many people had been interested enough to ask about the sound and pick up a card. We also visited the various sites when the installation was in place to talk with customers as they actually experienced the installation, as well as supporting them to complete the customer questionnaires if they felt they wanted to. We found that interacting with customers face to face was a much more fruitful way of gathering information than simply collecting their written thoughts.

What did we Discover?

“Whilst they stopped, they looked at my shop and in the window, and if that made them come in and be curious, that was good” – Margate Retailer

- 3.3 Out of 1500 postcards that were left at the different locations, 558 were taken which means that at least 558 people were curious about the installation to talk to the retailers and investigate further. However, it is important to note that a large number of people enquired about the installation and did not want to take a card. Instead, they chatted to the retailers about the installation and the wider context of the project.
- 3.4 Thirty-seven customers felt inspired to complete a self completion customer questionnaire (also left at the host locations) and these were the results:

	Yes	No	No Response	Not Sure
<i>Have you spoken to any of the retailers about the installation?</i>	23	14		
<i>Do you think the bird sound changes how the high street feels?</i>	24	9	4	
<i>Do you think that the installation is a good idea?</i>	29	5	1	2

In other words:

62% of people spoke to the retailers about the installation
64% of people agreed that the bird sound changed how the high street felt
78% of people thought that the installation was a good idea

6 males completed the questionnaire
31 females completed the questionnaire

3 people were aged between 10-19
7 people were aged between 30-39
7 people were aged between 40-49
13 people were aged between 50-59
3 people were aged between 60-69
4 people were aged between 70-79

3.5 We also asked a qualitative question on the customer self completion questionnaire, which was: *What did you think or feel when you heard the sound installation and how does it change how the high street feels?* We received the following comments:

"It was cheerful and unexpected"

"Makes it a happier place"

"Quite liked it once you get used to it"

"Up-lifted, sounds like Spring"

"Pleasant to hear"

"A joyful sound in a dreary street"

"Softer, more friendly approach"

"Would like more installations"

"It sounded peaceful and natural, so many people commented on the birds"

"It's such a natural relaxing thing to listen to. It also encouraged people to talk about it and how birds make them feel"

"It would be good if it was permanent"

"Feels happier and nice"

"Improved the stress levels"

"You feel peaceful and at ease"

"I wish it was real, I want one"

"It makes you smile, which is good"

It's just a lovely sound, nicer than seagulls"

"It is a cheerful sound"

"Calming and lovely"

- 3.6 As well as speaking with the customers, we also spoke with the retailers. Without exception, all the retailers felt that the sound improved the atmosphere in their shops and used words like, 'cheerful', 'peaceful' and 'calm' to describe the change in mood. Most also felt that the sound changed the way the high street felt and this could be developed further by joining to other town centre or high street initiatives.
- 3.7 We also spoke with Margate Task Force and Thanet Community Safety Unit, and they referred to the 'Broken Window Theory': a metaphor used to describe a concept that if one window is broken and not fixed then people and communities will assume that no one cares and soon many more windows will be broken and the area will spiral into crime and violence. It was felt that *Singing Windows* could not change the high street or area in isolation, but with regularity and joining up with other strategic initiatives, change was possible.
- 3.8 At least 50% of retailers would be keen to explore the sound installation as part of a wider marketing initiative for their business and some would consider paying to be involved in a similar initiative again if the price was affordable.

4. Psychoacoustics and anti-social Behaviour – linked to a reported decrease in anti-social behaviour.

- 4.1 (During the experimental pilot project one retailer commented how anti-social behaviour had been reduced once the installation was in place and then had returned once the installation was taken away.)
- 4.2 In this follow up stage, one of the retailers in Margate also reported a reduction in anti-social behaviour in front of her premises once the installation was in place and then a return of the anti-social behaviour once the installation was taken away. All of the separate *Singing Windows* installations were taken down by 18 January 2014, and so her experience is not thought to be connected to Margate Task Force's dispersal order scheme which was put in place in February 2014. It is, of course, difficult to prove whether the installation was responsible for the temporary decrease in anti-social behaviour (or, at least, the perceived decrease in anti-social behaviour), although the experience of the retailer should be noted.
- 4.3 In the ward of Cliftonville West which covers Northdown Road (where the installation was in place) generally retailers were unaware of any connection between the sound installation and any reduction of anti-social behaviour issues. However, one retailer was interested to explore this further and keen to be considered as a participant for future similar opportunities. His premises is open for 2/3 days per week and located next to an area where behaviour can sometimes be an issue; he felt that he was not present in his premises for a consistent and adequate amount of time to make a judgement on the 'difference' in terms of anti-social behaviour. However, according to statistics supplied by Margate task Force, the anti-social behaviour figures for the

ward of Cliftonville (where the installation was in place), the reported incidents fell from 1102 incidents (April 2012 – March 2013) to 975 (April 13 to March 2014): a decrease of 127 (or 11.5%). Similarly to 4.2, it is not possible to gauge just how influential the *Singing Windows* installation might have been in relation to this decrease in reported incidents.

- 4.4 It is clear that any effect that the installation had, if at all, was subtle and therefore difficult to quantify statistically. Nevertheless, from our interviews with the retailers and general public, there was a general feeling that the installation's effect was positive in the sense that the general atmosphere was improved and that people reported feeling cheerier. Connected with this was also a perception expressed by some that the street felt safer, and this correlated with statistics shared by Margate Task Force (who are now interested in engaging in a follow-up conversation about the work).

5. How did people physically respond to the bird sound?

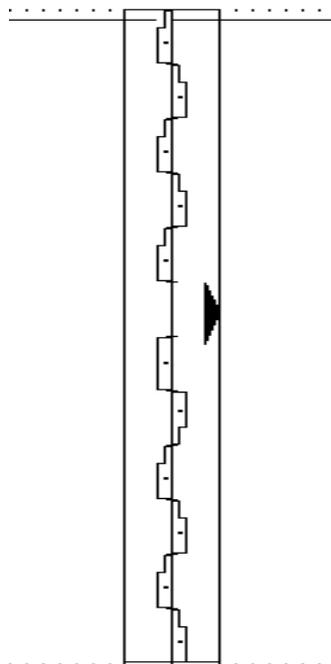
- 5.1 We were interested to capture how people interacted and responded to the bird sound. This was achieved through observing people's movement patterns on an 'as and when' basis throughout the duration of the installation and also through accessing the CCTV unit (close circuit television) in Thanet District Council Offices. To help facilitate this, we made use of a technique devised by Rudolf Laban (called Labanotation), which is a method of recording human movement. (Laban was a movement theorist, dance and choreographer, and was born in 1879. He raised the status of dance as an art form, was the first person to establish community dance, and reformed the role of dance education.)
- 5.2 Please note that the following notation examples are not meant to be complete or accurate. The purpose is to give a flavour of how we documented people's movement and body language as a creative addition to this report.

Narrative - Broadstairs Man Walking

On the right is the notated walking pattern of a male who noticed the bird sound in Broadstairs.

He walked past one of the shops where the installation was placed and stopped and held his weight on his left foot while his right foot was placed loosely on the ground to his right.

He stopped for a moment and then continued walking.

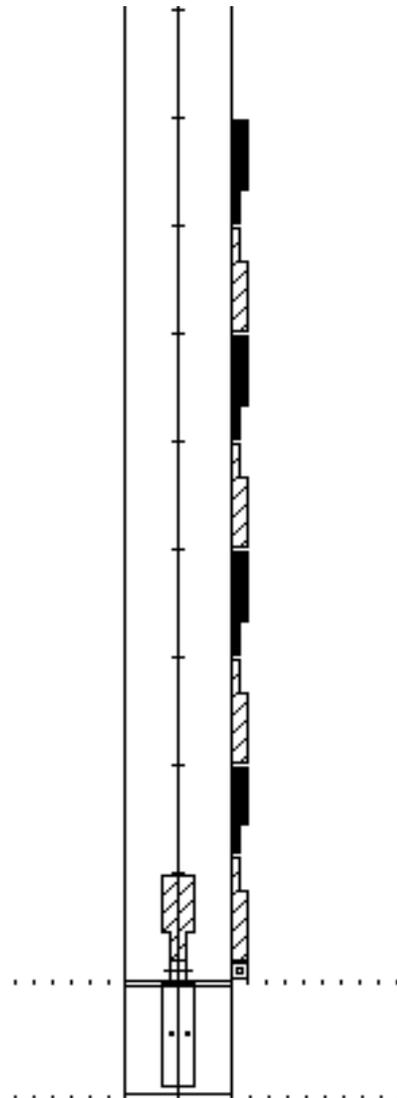


Narrative - Margate Woman Sitting

On the right is the notated movement of a woman who noticed the bird sound in a café.

The woman was seated with three other people, enjoying her lunch. On four occasions, the woman stopped eating her lunch and straightened her back and turned her head to look for the bird in the window. She said nothing to anyone else but she had clearly noticed the sound.

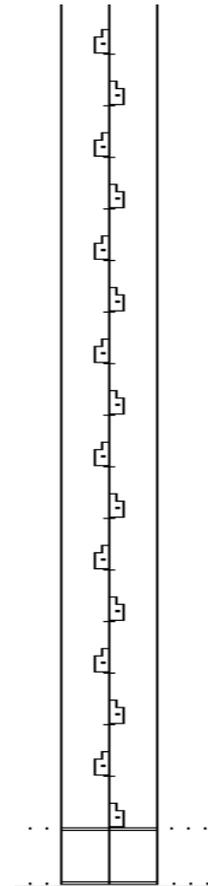
Her movement was very natural and non-stylised, she repeated the movement at the same speed each time, slowly and not rushed. Although this analysis doesn't tell us how the woman was thinking or feeling, she definitely heard the sound and stopped to listen.



Narrative - Running Man Margate

The notation on the right is of a man running, and was spotted whilst observing several of the participating shops at the same time using the CCTV cameras in the Thanet District Council Offices.

It is obvious that the man was oblivious to the bird sound, however, the speed and distance that he covered, and the way that he navigated his way through the high street, was eye catching and, we felt, deserved to be captured.



APPENDIX

Retailer Questions: Quantitative - pre and post installation – Example 1

Business Name:
Contact Name :
Date:
1.	How is your business doing at the moment? Poor.....Excellent (rate where you are on the above scale with a vertical line)
2.	How many people come into your shop during a typical day? 0-15 <input type="checkbox"/> 16-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46+ <input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Can you be more specific in terms of the above and narrow it down to one number? <input type="checkbox"/>
4.	How many transactions are there in one day? <input type="checkbox"/>
5.	How much money do your customers usually spend in your shop? Under £10 <input type="checkbox"/> £11-£25 <input type="checkbox"/> £26-£40 <input type="checkbox"/> over £40 <input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Can you be more specific in terms of the actual amount? <input type="checkbox"/>
7.	How many customers engage in conversation with you before a transaction? 25% <input type="checkbox"/> 50% <input type="checkbox"/> 75% <input type="checkbox"/> 100% <input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Roughly how long is each conversation? <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes

Customer self completion questionnaire – Example 2

Singing Windows – thank you for picking me up!	
Once you have completed the questionnaire, please hand it back to the retailer. To find out more about <i>Singing Windows</i> ask the retailer for a postcard or visit www.singingwindows.com	
1.	Why did you come to Rochester today? Shopping <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting a friend <input type="checkbox"/> Passing through <input type="checkbox"/> Heard about the installation <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason.....
2.	What did you think or feel when you heard the bird sound?
3.	Have you spoken to any of the retailers about the installation? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Do you think the bird sound changes how the high street feels? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, please tell us how?
5.	Do you think that the installation is a good idea? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about the installation? Please use the space below.
7.	We would like to know a little about you in order to help us better understand your responses. Are you? Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Age	0-9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10-19 <input type="checkbox"/> 20-29 <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 <input type="checkbox"/> 60-69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70-79 <input type="checkbox"/> 80-89 <input type="checkbox"/> 90+ <input type="checkbox"/>