

# #16 Janet Cardiff: Forty Part Motet

## Audio Description Script by Debbie Hippler

Janet Cardiff created “Forty Part Motet,” in 2001. A motet is a musical piece based on religious text and a genre that flourished during the Renaissance. The first installation of this piece was in New York City just weeks after the 9/11 attack.

In a room about 20 by 30 feet are eight sets of five speakers each, arranged around two leather backless benches in the center of the room. The forty 18” x10” x10” black speakers are mounted on black-and-silver metal stands with legs that form an “X” on the floor. (Be careful not to trip on them!) A single voice emanates from each speaker; and in each group of five speakers, the five voice parts (bass, baritone, tenor, alto, and soprano) are represented from left to right, though only one might sing at a given time. This particular motet is sung in counterpoint, with different voices or groups of voices sometimes singing different parts at different times, or sometimes not at all.

The artist uses sound as a sculpture and has been quoted as saying, “Our ears are designed for 3 dimensional sound … the sound waves hitting your body from forty separate speakers in such a pure way it really affects you emotionally, the sound just goes totally into you, and if it’s the right space it really reverberates within your body”.

In this motet, the Salisbury Cathedral Choir sings the sacred music “Spem in Alium” (an abbreviated version of the full Latin phrase whose translation is: "I have never put my hope in any other but you, O God of Israel." The recording is 11 minutes long with a 3-minute break at the end. Your experience varies as you move around to stand in front of individual speakers hearing single voices; a group of five hearing multiple voices; or sit in the middle on a bench to hear the entire choir.