## Introduction

I am a junior now, but there was one day during my freshman year in college where I felt lost. So, I did what has brought me comfort for years and I took the T to Harvard Square. I remember leaning up against a lamp post, a camera from the school and a stabilizer in one hand and my phone in the other, talking to my dad about all of the worries in my mind. He was surprised I was in Harvard Square, but that was one of the only parts that made sense to me. My grandma lives close to the square, so every Thanksgiving since I can remember this has been the place for late night walks and shopping trips with mom that I looked forward to all year and, of course, amazing music. As I talked with my dad, my body was balancing on one of the poles that surrounds the triangle concrete island of Brattle Square in Harvard Square, and I was comforted by the music. Earlier this year, I remembered the calming effects of the space and the musicians during that time and returned there during my first time home alone for a weekend. I got candy corn soft serve ice cream at the store Milk and then wandered around, ice cream dripping, as I followed the music back to that spot. There were two men playing folk — one with a guitar and one with a washboard/horn/tambourine setup that filled me with such intense joy. I felt like part of the world. It is these two memories where I can completely go back to how I was feeling in the space, listening to musicians in Harvard Square. Iis that powerful feeling, of being totally in the present moment, and wanting to explore that power that drew me to this project.

This is the story of musicians Lisa Housman and Dave Falk of the band Sweet Wednesday, Beverly Woods and David Neiman, two hammer dulcimer players I coincidentally interviewed on the same day who have put out an album together, Pete Cassani, a guitar player and the principal songwriter of the band The Peasants, Stephen Baird, who has been fighting for street performer's rights for over 40 years and has dedicated his life to the street of Harvard

Square and Boston, and Haroku, a guitar player and singer who I met one day with my grandma as we listened to her play and I interviewed her in between songs. This is a paper about street music and the power of street musicians, or buskers, to create a spontaneous space in public where the audience and the musician interact to create a once in a lifetime encounter. The focus of the project is rooted around the stories that these musicians told about their experiences on the streets, as well as my observations and academic research that focuses on performance and public space.

This paper is broken down into three main focuses. After some general Harvard Square background history and Methodology description, I will first explore the culture of street musicians through their stories, including how they got into being street musicians and their experiences with money. Next, I will focus on how the audience interacts with the street musicians. Lastly, I will explore the space that music creates in public space. Overall, this paper is exploring how buskers, and the spontaneous interactions their music creates, has the power to create spaces where people can connect with each other and the space around them. As we will see, opportunities like this are getting rarer, especially in Harvard Square as it rapidly becomes more corporate.

## Background

Street music has a long history, a history that could start at so many places. At its heart, street musicians come from a genre of playing music in public, which has also been at the heart of human culture for as long as human culture has existed. For this paper, I focus on the history of street musicians in Harvard Square. The culture of street performing has developed in many different ways in many different spaces, but I give a more complete historical perspective on one specific place in hopes of developing a more grounded picture of this giant movement. Stephen

Baird, who was interviewed for this project, is a historian of street performers while also being one himself. He has been on the cutting edge of change in Harvard Square and spent years researching the history of the Square and busking around the world for his website buskeradvocates.org. The following history has been taken from the research that appears on his website and the oral history that he gave me in our interview together. The theory that grounds this paper will appear especially at the beginning of each focus section to ground the synthesizing of interviews that will happen in each section.

As we walked around Harvard Square, Stephen Baird explained that in May of 1973, a group of artists formed the Boston Street Singers Cooperative with the goal of legalizing street performance. Over the next few years, laws began to pass outlining street performing in the Boston area, including one in Cambridge in 1976. Over the next decades, groups of street performers joined together to put on festivals and continue advocating for the right to play in public spaces. Harvard Square was at the center of the counterculture space, especially from 1966 to 1970 where there was weekly musical gathering on Cambridge Common. A lot of the street activity stopped after the escalation of the anti-war protest and the Harvard Square riots centering around the protests. After that first ordinance was passed in Cambridge in 1976, there were still many arrests in the area. At this point in Harvard Square, the red line did not go passed the square, so there was a peak in transportation and people in the square and it was extremely busy all the time. The fight for street performer's rights got legal in 1989 when Attorney Dianna Stallone, with musicians like Stephen Baird supporting her, sent a letter to the City of Cambridge to challenge current regulations as unconstitutional, and in 1990 the second Cambridge Street Performers Ordinance was passed after a legal battle that included a Federal lawsuit. The culture continued to change as festivals and a strong music scene continued to be at the center of

Harvard Square. In 2003, a Street Artists Photo-Journalism Project started with the aim of documenting performances in the area, and every few years Stephen Baird does a street survey of who is performing. With the red line extension and the further corporatization of the area, Harvard Square is still busy, but not as busy as it used to be. Right now in Harvard Square, the permit is free to get, and the current ordinance states that a street musician can sell their own CDs and use amplification at 80db in a 25 feet distance.

## Methodology

I knew from the beginning that this research would mean a lot to me, so I made sure to be reflexive about my identity as a student, an interviewer, and an audience member(which meant tipping when I watched musicians). Being upfront about what this project means to me and why I am interested in music created a great atmosphere for interviewing. I first used Stephen Baird's website, buskeradvocates.org, to cold email everyone on his list with Harvard Square ties, including Stephen himself. I made sure to meet everyone where they were. I met Dave and Lisa at Coolidge Corner, but their daughter got sick so I just got coffee with Lisa. Beverly, David, and Pete I met over zoom. Haroku I listened to many times and one day recorded and interviewed her between songs. I met Stephen Biard in Harvard Square. As I walked over the Brattle Square, a street musician was playing and I saw one woman reading a book while another read her phone. Two men talked at the tables behind me, and one man brought some food and sat close to the street performer and they seemed to know each other. I had my camera because I hope to do my senior thesis on a documentary about Harvard Square and the people in it, so I was going to be filming Stephen. I saw a man talking to the street musician, which is when it dawned on me that I had no idea what Stephen looked like, but soon we met each other's eyes and he waved me over. We sat near the Brother Blues Memorial — a plaque street musicians created just a few

years ago to honor Brother Blue, a street performer and oral historian who impacted many people's lives and was a cornerstone of the Harvard Square street performing community. Overall, the methodology of this project was to be rooted in a mindset of being open, curious, and clear in what I was doing. Once this paper is done, I will send it to everyone I interviewed, along with the recording I did of our interviews together.

## 1) The Street Musician Experience

In this first section, I hope to explore the street performance culture, especially as it relates to the history that we just discussed above. Because all of the people I interviewed range in when they started and stopped (if they stopped) playing on the streets, through these accounts we not only see how these street musicians started busking, but also an overall introduction to some of the cultural experiences of street performing. I will also be exploring how money impacts the culture of playing on the streets for musicians. This point will later build as we explore how audience members experience and interact with the musicians, and lastly how the music and space created by the two groups adds to the actual space they occupy.

One of the main academic theories grounding me as I explored the idea of performance from the buskers point of view was Diana Taylor and her book "Framing Performance" Here she explains that "since the 1960s, artists have used their bodies to challenge regimes of power and social norms, placing the body front and center in artistic practice" (Taylor). The idea that performers are using their own skills to challenge regimes of power was an idea that was present across the stories of the people I interviewed. Pete Cassani and I talked for a while about why it was so powerful to be outside of systems of power. He said "street performers are a particular breed of people that don't want to live in a rule based society. We don't want to be a cog in a corporate wheel. We're not interested in what the HR department thinks about us. We don't give a

fuck about any of that stuff. And we're willing to live on the fringes of society, to be free to not have to buy into all that shit." Taylor's book also explores the idea of what a performance is when she says "But, we shall see, performance also works across time in intriguing and powerful ways. Instead of the once, the act that bursts on the scene only to vanish, we can also think of performance as an ongoing repertoire of gestures and behaviors that get reenacted or reactivated again and again, often without us being aware of them" (Taylor). To a street musician, this performance is planned and is often filled with repeated repertories of songs and interactions between different audience members, but for the audience it often feels like they are walking into a spontaneous show that does seem to burst onto the scene and then vanish. In this way, street performing is a complex type of performing that creates a new type of space, as we will explore throughout this paper. While Taylor's book is about all types of performance art, talking to different street performers, it is clear that many people feel like they are putting on a show, and there is a performance culture that intertwines with why people become street performers.

For Pete Cassani who plays guitar and sings and has a 1997 album title *Out on the Street*, he "didn't want to be part of the machine" He had friends living in Boston so he moved in Boston, and after some moving around and figuring out what he wanted to do, he said "I noticed that I liked Boston…and I liked that people were playing on the streets, you know, I always took note of street performers. And so I saved up some money and I moved back to Boston a year later" For Pete, performing was a way of survival. "I'm just going to play on the street or starve to death, you know, I'm not going to get a day job…I'm just going to do my own thing" He got an acoustic guitar and went down to the Subway around September of 1987 and he said "I was really nervous, you know of just playing in front of people in this completely 'anything goes space', which is the subway, you know, there's no rules. There's no stage. There's no bouncer.

There's no PA system. There's no schedule. There's no laws, there's no rules. It's anything can happen. And it's both scary as hell and it's exciting" Once Pete made the decision to make his living playing music on the streets, it was that first subway performance that encouraged him to keep it up. He talked to me about a man who stopped and listened to him, something that was rare in the subway as everyone ran to get on the next train. "Most people just get on the train, they don't look at you, they don't make eye contact, they don't give you any money. It's just kind of a cold thing. But this guy was listening" (Cassani). This man put what might have been a $20 into Pete's guitar case, and Pete said that was a push into the right direction. In the Spring, he began playing on the streets, which he liked a lot more, and his busking career started.

Pete talked to me about how he moved as a street performer and how he watched others move. He would play in Harvard Square, Boston Commons, Faneuil Hall, and Washington Square Park in the North End. " I did this circuit from Park Street Station in the afternoons to Government center for like, people just getting out of work 5/6 o'clock, and then Faneuil Hall from 8 o'clock to 11/12" Lisa, a singer in the band Sweet Wednesday, also was fond of Park Street, saying "It's funny because Park Street is the more lucrative spot if you can get Park Street, you know, especially certain times a day, in certain times a day, it's totally dead. But if you get it during, you know, certain busy times day or something like that. It can be very, very good. And that's always a lot of competition.  And so we would go Downtown Crossing because a lot of times there was nobody playing there. But Downtown Crossing was always just crazier and wilder." For Pete, to find a spot in Harvard Square, he would drive around scoping out what was available."In the late 80s, early 90s, Harvard Square was so jammed with street performers, that people would have to get there…for a really good spot, like the pit — somebody would show up at 9 in the morning and stake the spot. And they wouldn't play till 8 or 9 at night" (Cassani). In

these instances, Pete said that people would communicate and if musicians knew each other they would share a spot, or you could ask someone how long they are playing and they would often give the spot to you when they leave. The Pit, which Stephen Baird would talk about later as we walked through this large, circular space that now has wire tables and chairs, was his favorite spot. Pete described how it used to be that bands could play there and bands like the Ethnics that would come out every Saturday night had over 300 people around the Pit. He once played there with a tribute band to ACDC called Beefy DC which he remembered fondly when he said "Yeah, I can't really describe it to you, you gotta see it. And it was really a blast. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. Had a lot of fun. When it's good, playing on the street is better than anything. Yeah, it's better than playing in a club. I mean, clubs are good, too. But, you know, the street is a special thing. Anything goes, you know, goes both ways." (A video of Beefy D.C.: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RemWBGaImso)

Spots were so hotly contested because many people are making a living on this money, and Harvard Square at night was one of the best crowds. Pete explained the stress and struggle of making money when he said "you gotta realize you're making $1 at a time. And it takes hours. It would take six, eight hours for me to make like $150, you know." William H. Whyte talks about cities and how they are set up in his book "City: Rediscovering the Center" which is a book taken from his experiences "walking the streets and public spaces of the city and watching how people use them" for over 16 years. He makes many observations about the street including the social life of the street, street people, pedestrians, the physical street, the sensory street, and the design of spaces among many other things. He observed the culture of street musicians and money when he saw that "there is a strong domino effect; if two or more people stop to put in money there will likely be a rapid succession of givers. The entertainers usually acknowledge the

donations with a smile and a thank-you. A musician may salute with a few high notes. The acceptance, in sum, is done with grace. Rarely do entertainers express discourtesy to those who do not give." When performing on the street means making a living wage for your job, the experience is highly impacted as a performance aspect of some kind is vital.

David Neiman experienced this phenomenon, of making a performance and getting people to stop, when he was playing here in Boston and around the world. His busking experience goes back to the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s where he busked mainly in Faneuil Hall, and in the 90s a lot in Japan. A friend of his told him he should go play in Copenhagen, so he got a ticket and went and ended up playing in an amusement park, in Italy, and in Tokyo among other places. For him, the money was in teaching and gigs like wedding gigs, and he got a lot of business through street performing. He also thought about the social justice roots of busking in that it is always free to listen to the music. At the same time that it is free, he called the culture of performing and having free music and giving money a "delicate balance" because it is money musicians are relying on for their life. He said what made his performance and often drew in a crowd was the hammer dulcimer. He explained that this is an unusual instrument that has more appeal than other instruments, and you can use that appeal to draw people in to talk to them. David played in Harvard Square, where it is a first come first serve spot situation, but primarily played in Faneuil Hall where he reflected "property lines matter, right. Like the people out in front of the actual Faneuil Hall, the drummer's or whoever's out, that's all impromptu. But once you get onto the Quincy Market property that's all auditioned and scheduled." Quincy Market, and Harvard Square as it gets more corporate, are blurring the lines between public and private space, which we will expand on later in the paper.

Beverly Woods also said the hammer dusumar in itself was a big part of her performance. She and David Neiman actually did an album together “Because at a certain point. Being a hammer dulcimer player wasn't enough. And so then we had to hammer dulcimer players.” (Their CD is here: https://beverlywoods.net/beverlyrec.html) Beverly actually decided on the hammer dulcimer because of its impact on the performance. She said with a guitar or a keyboard no one would give her a second look, but with this unique instrument there was some curiosity. “I looked around the teepee (where she was living at the time). And I thought it's gonna be a long time before I get a Steinway in this place(piano is her first instrument). What am I going to do? So, I started thinking about piano family instruments. So basically how far back up the piano family tree is you have to go to get something that was portable, and would fit into my non existent home space” She explained that in 1980 it was very hard to get a hammer dulcimer unless you could build one, so she built a hammer dulcimer and taught herself how to play it. Once she knew 4 songs, she visited a friend of hers in Portland Maine who encouraged her to play outside of the ice cream shop where her friend worked. She remembers the experience, her first time busking, when she says “I went and I practiced my four tunes all afternoon. At the end of the afternoon. I knew the four tunes really well. And what was in my cup added up to minimum wage. Liberation, okay, if I can make minimum wage doing this, then all I need to do is a whole heck of a lot of this.” That was June 1980, and after deciding that Boston would be the place to be, she spent the next 18 years, 40 weekends a year, up in Boston playing the hammer dulcimer.

As she reflected on Harvard Square and all of the advocacy work that has happened there for street performers, Beverly also mentioned that she was one of the people in Burlington Vermont who made a proposal to present to the mayor, at that time Bernie Sanders, to advocate

for street performers. When I talked to Stephen Baird he said Beverly has done a lot of busking, and also got arrested by the police for playing in the streets before. Beverly's advocacy, much like Pete's, came from the very act of playing herself. She originally started"because I was looking for a way to make a living as a musician that didn't require interacting very much with the music business. I really had no interest in conforming to the gender expectations that were, and unfortunately, still are generally attached to what a woman playing music should be like. And I didn't want to be dependent on interacting with that. So I wanted to find a way to make a living by playing music that didn't require the music business. So that was my solution to that. And that was, you know, the mainstay of what I did for 18 years."

When Beverly and I talked about Harvard Square, she reflected on the long ays (3 hour drive each way and a 10 hour day on the streets), the high cost of living in Boston, and September 11th 2001, which led to the international crowds which were often very friendly to buskers slowing down, as to why she had to stop playing in the Square. Money again played into picking spots. As she remembered: "if you're playing to make money, you have to go where you can make money, and there are very limited places where you could do that. Actually, my mainstay was actually Faneuil Hall….So, you know, Harvard Square is, and has been, one of the only places that you could play, somewhat thanks to Steve Baird's work… I mean, you could play all day in Central Square. And not make 10% of what you'd make in Harvard Square. So that's why people go where they go, because there's a whole culture " Beverly was also the first person to tell me about the coin flip they had in Harvard Square. This was a coin flip to decide who had what spot in Harvard Square when, but every person I talked to had a different time for when this flip happened, anywhere from 5am to 8am. For Beverly and Lisa the early time was one of the reasons to find other places in Boston to play. Lisa even said she and her husband

Dave would rather play in a spot that is less lucrative that have to do something like the coin toss: “it's it's nice to just be able to play and not have to worry about you know, other people wanting your spot or you have to wait for the spot and stuff like that.”

Stephen Baird also talked about the coin toss, as in some accounts he had been the one to set it up, but when he talked about it, it was not as big of a deal as all of the other advocacy and problem solving initiatives he and his coalition of street performers have created over the years. Because I am making a documentary about Harvard Square, I recorded Stephen as he took me on a 2 hour tour of Harvard Square, and explained how he himself got into informing the culture of street musicians through advocacy. He is a street performer himself, and at one point, the police came down and tried to arrest him and arrested his audience. As he tells it: “I went back and I spent an entire two winters in Boston Public Library, reading court cases, First Amendment law, essentially, I wanted to know enough about the law so I can fight.” After reading essentially all of the court cases from 1800 to 1973, he was “stunned” by what he read and realized “they can’t stop us.” His first letters to the police threatened his life and made the situation worse, but he sent more letters to people in the Boston City Hall and slowly did the work to legalize street performing in Boston one area at a time. As we walked, Stephen had descriptions similar to Pete, David, Beverly, and Lisa about the culture of street performing. He described performances of people climbing on buildings in a performance that always got people to stop, while the musicians had to fight for that attention, or even just to hear themselves over the noise of the traffic. He described that when Harvard Square was the last stop, it was extremely busy, and for a little bit the decibel meter was lower than the traffic decibel, so it was impossible to play. This is where the audience comes in to make the culture of busking even more complex.

## 2) <u>The Audience</u>

As we have heard from the street musicians above, there is no specific type of music that must be played on the streets, and it is this diversity of music that adds to the culture of street performing. Everyone from bands to hammer dulcimer players to acoustic players and everyone in between can play the music that speaks to them, meaning the function of street music in street culture comes from the space that is created in this unique performer/audience member interaction. We have also seen that people have lots of different reasons for playing on the street, but for many it is the work to make a living wage. Audience members are free to come and go and there is an informal money making process that relies on passerbys being moved to drop a few coins or dollars into the guitar case or bucket or wagon in front of the performer. The music creates a space for this cultural practice to happen, and then music influences the public culture of the city street that is then filled with music(an idea we will further expand in the last section). To create a culture between the audience member and the performer that involves sharing music but also the exchange of money, street musicians have different ways of creating a music making space around them.

The academic theorists that ground me here include Karolina Doughty and Maja Lagerqvist who talk about the ethical potential of sound in public spaces. They found that "busking in public urban spaces has the potential to affect encounters with urban space and others within it" especially by looking at how "migrant music has ethical potential in its capacity to effectively and emotionally reconfigure space as more open and inclusive" (Doughty, Lagerqvist). Musical performances, especially in the street culture where any type of music is free to be played, can affect audiences to be more inclusive to each other and in the general space. Effects like this is what helped Harvard Square become such a center for street performance — it became an open place in part because of the diversity of talent there. Doughty

and Lagergvist also talk about how “encounters with music are subject to power-geometries and musicians and audiences’ differential capacities to affect and be affected,” meaning that audiences and musicians have the power to affect each other (Doughty, Lagerqvist). Robbie Ho and Wing Tung Au also talk about the power of music to change a space and the difference between busking and begging in two articles that are based on two studies that they did. In the studies they found that “busking should be considered as a unique activity distinguishable from begging for its performance and entertainment values that the current studies have shown to enhance the perception of public space” (Au, Ho). When looking at how audiences look at the people that they meet on the streets, Au and Ho focused and found in their studies that musicians were enchanting the spaces where audience members and musicians would meet. When talking to the different street musicians, it was clear that they had all had memorable audience experiences, and each had different ways for engaging the audience and creating that space for inclusivity and, hopefully, some donations.

David Neiman thinks about the audience in how to get the first person to stop and create the space, with him as the musician, for others to stop. “So the key was getting the first person to stop and the first couple of people and drawing them in, and then lots of people stop. And being able to explain what I was doing….That's true anywhere. Yeah, being able to communicate with your audience. Seeing people who just play with their heads down whatever they're doing, it's like, that's not the way to perform, you have to be on the street, you really need to be out there. You really need to be reaching out to people, more so than on a stage where you have a captive audience…You really have to bring them in if you want to be performing for them.” David remembered one time when he was playing a Bach piece and then a man asked him to play it again and a boys choir sang with him. This was a spontaneous moment between the audience and

the musician that then became a moment between a bunch of musicians performing together in a once in a lifetime, unplanned space and event. This freedom for audience interaction is what a lot of the musicians I talked to remembered fondly.

Beverly explained this freedom when she said “the great thing on the street is, you know, if somebody doesn't like it, they're not a captive audience. They can just keep going. So you know, and for me with my four tune repertoire, that's fine, that’s as long as most people tend to stand around anyway.” She explained that in Harvard Square “you actually would get an audience that would build up into a circle that would listen to you for a particular amount of time. And so then you could shape your program for that.” When there is something to center attention around, like a musician, a crowd can form into a space. Not only is there freedom if audiences are able to stop and watch or not, but that also means playing on the street can be a great time to practice new material and test it out in front of a crowd. That is what Lisa and Dave do often. They are playing more gigs now, but before when they had more of a mix of paid gigs and busking, they would often try out songs on the street and see how they sounded in front of a crowd. Lisa explained to me that she tries to engage the crowd by moving her body, and because she plays with her husband, they are able to tag teams getting people to come over. She said “when I first met Dave, I was playing guitar and all my songs. And you know, it, it was, it was really a process to learn how to, you know, connect with the audience singing when you're not playing an instrument like at this point, I actually feel like really comfortable connecting with the audience without playing an instrument. Like I like, using my arms. I can actually, like, use my body to be a part of the music.” By moving her body and dancing, Lisa is able to draw more people in, and because there are two people who can talk to audience members, that is a lot more

potential for positive space making that will lead to people staying around for longer and perhaps becoming invested enough to drop some money into the guitar case.

Pete Cassani also brought people into the musical space he was created by talking to people. For him, this is such a natural part of street performing that in our interview we had to come back to this question because at first thought Pete couldn't remember doing anything special to get an audience. He then remembered: " I would talk to people definitely, you know, when I set up, usually somebody would be like, What are you doing? Or what are you going to play? And I talked to them and me as people as people come by, sometimes I asked him for requests…or I'll say this song is for you, you know." Talking to people is a natural way to build a connection with another human, and that can in turn create an openness among audience members.

Stephen Baird and I talked a lot about the audiences that are created because of street performing. Near Brattle Square, which is in Harvard Square and is the little triangle concrete island near a local flower shop and some cafes, we walked past a statue honoring a street performer named Igor Fokin. (Video of Igor here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJ2gizaqVw8) Stephen described the audience during this performance where "every child and every grown up…they would sit down with him and watch this guy talking to his puppets," and says in the above video "you'll see how intimate the relationship between artists and audience is. Children are often one of the first because they're just curious about everything." The statue that we stand near, a little golden puppet in a suit with a horn, celebrates Igor's life and how the street musician and performer community, as well as Harvard Square overall, came together when Igor died suddenly from a heart attack when he was 36 years old. His wife and three young children wanted to go back to Russia and could use the

support, “so all the street performers got together, they put on an entire weekend of shows here on all the big acts that do the big stilts and fire walking and torches and the jugglers and the magicians. And they raised close to $50,000, in one weekend” (Baird). Stephen Baird explained that this was in 1996, and the people who put on the show still get together every year and facetime with the family in Russia, calling this coming together of community of performers and audience members alike to make a change “part of the subculture of this space.” The audience musician relationship in Harvard Square is strong, so strong that it has the power to change people’s lives whether that be with $50,000 to celebrate the life of a cornerstone of Harvard Square culture in 1996 or making someone smile as they talk with a musician today.

Next, to get more specific about street music and audience interaction, I recorded Haroko and have the transcription below. When I asked her, Haroko said she didn’t do anything in particular to try and get people to come over and listen and hopefully give her money. Instead of doing the things we talked about above like actively engaging in conversations, dance with children, taking requests, or move their bodies, all to create a welcoming space and get that first person to stop, Haroko said “I don't really do anything, if people want to stop that is wonderful, but if they don’t want to stop that is wonderful too.” Yet as an observer, I saw people pausing for a moment and giving money because of a culture Haroko was creating. That idea is explored more below.

## **An Example in Audience Interaction: Transcription**

To set the stage for this song, I think it is important to paint a picture of the person making this music. For Haroko, street performing has always been about having fun. She takes up space wherever she can find it in Harvard Square. The day I recorded her, she was in the concave of a building at the top of the T station in the center of the Square near the old

information booth. Even a block away you can almost hear the promise of a melody down the road. While her music filled the center of the Square, she herself was off to the side, set in a nook with one amp on her right that connected her mic and guitar that were both in front of her. A metal wagon is in front of her with bills thrown in from passersbys. Haroko is the only one playing in Harvard Square today. She sings and smiles at people as they walk by, some cheering her on and some not making eye contact. Many people mill by either coming out of the subway or crossing the main road of Harvard Square, but I think I am the only one who is standing and listening to her at the moment. I stand for a couple songs, meeting her eye with my mask on until I realize there are not many people near and I take off my mask so we can smile at each other. I see a couple people pass by and drop in a dollar or two, which made me wonder if I had missed them standing off to the distance. Every time someone came up to Haroko she would continue to strum but stop singing to say thank you and nod her head. These stops in lyrics never interrupted her rhythm, and in some ways these short conversations flowed into a song that was already completely Haroko's.

Every time she ends a song I clap, once in a while someone else passes by and claps as well, but as the one person standing she makes eye contact with me as we nod our heads at each other and smile. I ask to record her and as the people mill pass, she sings. Even when the first notes aren't quite right, she just laughs and continues on, redoing the last guitar strums and continuing with the words of Sounds of Silence. She makes the song her own as her accent intertwines with the melody of the song that sometimes rests on the high or low notes with a little bit of a twang that is held out with vibrato as the guitar continues to strum with energy. Her eyes are happy and she smiles at each person and looks like she is having so much fun, especially as we make eye contact again and again as I record. We laugh together and in the background you

can hear other people laughing as they walk past, enjoying Harvard Square and the music in it. Soon, my grandma, who lives near Harvard Square, joins me. I had told her I would be coming in to listen to musicians today so she decided to meet me, and together we stood together, listening to Haroko and people watching.

To capture Haroko in a transcription, even a non-western, more abstract transcription such as this one, fails to capture her smile. As she meets people's eyes, she smiles, and every time we meet each other's gaze as I hold out my recorder to her, she nods and her eyes light up. This human interaction that is centered on smiles and enjoying music together that audience members can walk in and out of creates a freedom that seems so innate to the culture that street music creates. Like some people I interviewed remarked, even when it is a challenge, there is a freedom in making your own money outside of traditional systems. There is a freedom in doing what you love and sharing it with others. For the audience member, there is a freedom to go in and out of the space, and even as you go out of the space, the music can follow you as it drifts off as you take more and more steps away from this spontaneous interaction. I tried to capture this culture of freedom by making a transcription that uses shapes and colors to represent the music that Haroko created, with the words as the grounding center of the document. Charles Seeger influenced how I thought about what a transcription could be by exploring how "the truth may lie somewhere between" different ways of writing (Seeger). He explains that "visual representation of melody as a chain is comparatively easily done by a chain of symbols; as a stream, by a curving line," which made me think about how I could try to capture all that makes up Haroko's performance from her melody to rhythm to dynamics to what is happening around her.

As the recording of Haroko singing "Sounds of Silence" starts, Haroko sings "because the vision softly creeping" and laughs and strums and hums for a second before singing the

"right" words and chords. This moment reflects a culture created by music that also speaks to the freedom of a culture that lets you make mistakes. There is a culture created of a human showing themselves and their music, but without the formality of a stage setting and an attentive, watching audience, there is a free flowing culture that is at the heart of playing music on the street. "The Sounds of Silence" is originally sung by Simon and Garfunkel, is a song with its own history and sound, yet on the streets, any music is fair game to sing and play and enjoy. As Geoffrey Himes explains for Smithsonian Magazine, Paul Simon got in touch with Art Garfunkle after writing "Sounds of Silence," which led them to get a contract with Columbia Records in March 1964 where they recorded 12 songs for their new album *Wednesday Morning, 3AM.* Tom Wilson, the producer of the song, added a "rock rhythm section over their folk rendition" without Simon and Garfunkel knowing, but once they heard it and this new song was released in October, it hit number 1 in January 1966 (Himes). They quickly recorded the album *Sounds of Silence* and performed the song at almost every show they had together (Himes).

In this transcription, the words are written out, with a black line below the words that tries to convey her rhythm and volume. Her speed is conveyed through lines in the lyrics that show where she lingers on certain words and adds space. There are then purple lines above the words that try to express how the guitar played in its strumming in rhythm, volume, and speed, including trying to express when her notes are more rounded or staccato in how the line is drawn. While the lines run into each other, I feel that adds to the feeling of creating that Haroko has when she plays. She plays for fun, and that is clear in how she creates, so I wanted to honor that in this transcription that tries to capture the feeling of a performance on the street. There are also notes on the side of the transcription that try to describe some of the people who walk by and interact with Haroko in an attempt to add to the atmosphere created by this musical street

performance. (Link To Recording: Harvard Square April 10th 2022 Sounds Of Silence Haroko.mp3) (Link to Transcription: Transcription)

After "Sounds of Silence," Haroko plays songs like "Puff the Magic Dragon" and "Stand by Me" and "Country Road." Other street musicians play very different music, yet they are all part of this street musician culture. The uniting factor seems to be a culture of people playing what they love. It is clear that Haroko sings with heart, and maybe that is what people see and connect to as they drop money into her wagon. As she ends the song, the transcription aims to show the space she makes for a dramatic conclusion that ends slowly and with a fade after quick strumming. The culture comes out in the transcription as the listener hears clapping, that is written into the transcription, and then Haroko replying with joy her thanks. It is thanks for listening, but as an observer of street culture over these past few months, it seems like this thanks is also for entering in this space with the performer, whether that be giving money, dancing, or just enjoying the music and culture of the space together.

### 3) How Busking Impacts Public Space

We have already discussed how street performers see the culture of street performing, including how the audience and musicians interact, so in this last section I turn to how street musicians influence a place and why it is so important to fight for public spaces.

Here, I again turn to Victor Turner and his talk of liminal spaces, along with Karolina Doughty and Maja Lagerqvist as these scholars explore how people can change a space to make it more than we have the language to explain. Turner says "if our basic model of society is that of a 'structure of positions,' we must regard the period of margin or 'liminality' as an interstructural situation" (Turner). After observing music in Harvard Square and hearing from musicians, it is clear to me that music on the streets, in public space, has the power to be intersectional to move

beyond structures as it is rooted in being outside of systems. Turner goes on to recognize that "people can 'be themselves,' it is frequently said, when they are not acting institutionalized roles" (Turner). Talking specifically about street music and their approach to theory, Karolina Doughty and Maja Lagerqvist explain that "our reading of the interactions between sound, space and affect is post-humanist because for us, sound offers a way to re-think the classic binaries of subject and object, inside and outside" Doughty, Lagerqvist). Creating space for people to come together and interact, especially in every digitizing, corporatizing, rebounding from an isolating pandemic world, is one of the most powerful ways humans create impact on society and each other. Space for connection to happen, especially that is beyond institutions, can go beyond binaries of understanding to be more complex, and in turn gives people the opportunities to see the humans and spaces around them as more complex.

Jonathan Sterne also explores this concept in his article "Sounds like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space." Here, he finds that the Mall of America, a very corporate entity, "both presumes in its very structure and requires as part of its maintenance a continuous, nuanced, and highly orchestrated flow of music to all its parts. It is as if a sonorial circulation system keeps the Mall alive…. music becomes a form of architecture" (Sterne). Similar to what Sterne saw, I see music as vital to the life of Harvard Square. I think about the layout of the square through where the street musicians play, and their sonic space travels far beyond their physical space to create a sonic map through the square. "Rather than simply filling up an empty space, the music becomes part of the consistency of that space. The sound becomes a presence, and as that presence it becomes an essential part of the building's infrastrastructure" (Sterne). It was clear to me when talking to street musicians that

their music was more than just music, it was a presence that led to connection, a living wage, and a created space.

Throughout our tour of the square, Stephen continued to come back to the theme of needing to fight for street performers because of what they bring to the space, especially against corporate entities. He led me around and said “let's do all those spaces first. And then we can kind of review how they're used. Because the spaces are used differently too, and artists will pick the spaces that best suit who they are.” We went from space to space where musicians plays and he pointed out who could play where. You can be in Brattle Square if you are in a band and can play over the traffic on three sides, or if you are playing acoustically there are some spots near the green close to Shake Shack and the colorful lights that hang in Harvard Square. There is not one space that works for every street performer, and picking a good spot is important not only for making money but for fitting into this public space.

It was in the green where we talked about the battles street performers have had with sound and protecting their space, and how Stephen Baird has worked with different government bodies and street musicians throughout his life. At one point the decibel level was 50db, and Stephen explained that that was barely louder than a whisper. “So they were essentially banning conversations, which is what I wrote… you know, an average car driving by is 80db, and a truck is 100db. So technically, you can't even measure performers noise level, if it's below the ambient sound. And with all the traffic in Harvard Square, the ambient sound is typically 80db during traffic.” Pete Cassani and I talked a lot about the regulations of Harvard Square and how, especially for him and his band where playing drums would almost always put you above the db level, regulations like these drove him out of the square. It is clear that there have been a lot of battles to fight for the right to take up space and affect the space of Harvard Square.

As Stephen and I stood in the Pit, chairs were around and people walked through this empty space. This was where Pete had talked about his band and how Harvard Square used to be "every storefront doorway was a possible place to play" and the Pit was totally open, ready to be filled with music (Cassani). Stephen also recalled bands playing here and filling up the entire space. He also told me about the spaces they had to fight for — like how the concrete island that I love the most used to not be there, and when it was added "the square at one time was extremely busy. With the triangle, three different artists would set up on all three sides of the triangle, and it would rotate shows…That keep going and the crowds keep it up to 5000 people on his island every weekend" At the height of street music in Harvard Square, people were flocking to these spaces, and Stephen is fighting to try to build up that environment again, or at least protect the musical space that is there now. Beverly talked to me about the loss of public space in the country and how Stephen and so many street musicians are passionate about protecting these spaces because "corporate entities…set themselves up as being able to say who can do what in them…the loss of public spaces in which you can actually exercise your first amendment rights in many way besides playing music, is one of the things that I've witnessed just sweeping the country." Busking isn't just about making music that people can enjoy, at the heart of it is also standing for freedom and humanity in an ever corporate world.

David and I talked a lot about the spontaneous nature of people walking in and out of the space and how with busking " There's an element of surprise, you know, it's like, all of a sudden, you come across music out in the open, it just adds to the atmosphere of wherever you are" Liz expanded on this when she said, like most of the people that I talked to, that she chooses her music based on what she feels like playing. At the same time, she thinks about creating space in her songs for people to find what they need in that moment, especially songs with stories because

those ones “can help you understand your own place in the world and they can help you understand others and also just, yeah, just provide that comfort…we need to feel connection, and I feel like, stories really provide that and it's great because you're like, singing the songs with other people.” If there is one thing that I have learned through observing street musicians now, it is the power of people to find what they need in the music and a space of gathering that makes busking such a vital life force and architecture of Boston and Harvard Square.

## Conclusion

Overall, this project added to my life, and I think that speaks to the power of music and human connections that are at the heart of street music. By centering the voices of street musicians as we talked about busking culture, the audience musician interaction, and then how music impacts public space, I hoped to amplify the stories of people who are often walked, but are vital to the streets of Harvard Square, Boston, and the world.

Street musicians create spontaneous space in a public world, and in places like Harvard Square that are increasingly becoming more commercial, there is power in making space and fostering interactions between humans. More broadly, this paper ended up being about how people connect with other people. Making space for connections to be made, in any way we can, music or otherwise, can be the way to change the world so that it is a more human centered world. Street musicians are doing that everyday by creating space through their music for people to gather. Whether it be through music or other means, making space for humans to be open, understanding, and interacting has always been and will always be vital for creating the human world that people like Stephen, Lisa, Beverly, David, Pete, and Haroko are fighting for everyday.

**Bibliography**

Baird, Stephen. *Street Performers and Buskers Directory, Boston, United States, America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia*. http://www.buskersadvocates.org/saalist.html. Accessed 11 May 2022.

Cassani, Pete. 20 Apr. 2022.

Clua, Álvaro, et al. "Urban Opportunities and Conflicts around Street Musicians: The Relationship between the Configuration of Public Space and Outdoor Acoustics in Ciutat Vella, Barcelona." *Journal of Urban Design*, vol. 25, no. 5, Sept. 2020, pp. 561–89. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2019.1699398.

Diana Taylor. *Framing Performance*.

Doughty, Karolina, and Maja Lagerqvist. "The Ethical Potential of Sound in Public Space: Migrant Pan Flute Music and Its Potential to Create Moments of Conviviality in a 'Failed' Public Square." *Emotion, Space and Society*, vol. 20, Aug. 2016, pp. 58–67. *ScienceDirect*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2016.06.002.

Haroko. 10 Apr. 2022.

Ho, Robbie, and Wing Tung Au. "Differentiating Busking from Begging: A Psychological Approach." *PLOS ONE*, vol. 16, no. 12, Dec. 2021, p. e0260781. *PLoS Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0260781.

---. "Effect of Street Performance (Busking) on the Environmental Perception of Public Space." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12, 2021, p. 647863. *PubMed*, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.647863.

Houseman, Lisa. 29 Mar. 2022.

McDermott, Philip, et al. “Public Space, Collective Memory and Intercultural Dialogue in a (UK) City of Culture.” *Identities*, vol. 23, no. 5, Sept. 2016, pp. 610–27. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2015.1054828.

Neiman, David. 22 Mar. 2022.

Seeger, Charles. “Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing.” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 44, Apr. 1958, pp. 184–95.

Sterne, Jonathan. “Sounds like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space.” *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 41, no. 1, 1997, pp. 22–50. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/852577.

*Sweet Wednesday- About*. http://www.sweetwednesday.com/pages/about.html. Accessed 11 May 2022.

Turner. “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage.” *The Forest of Symbols*, 1964.

WHYTE, WILLIAM H. *City: Rediscovering the Center*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh8fz.

Woods, Beverly. 22 Mar. 2022.