

Sounds Inside

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Sounds Inside: the documentary | Prison Radio Association

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Being imprisoned for the first
time, many people are
surprised to discover that
they are not only cut off from
the day-to-day business of
the outside world, but also
transported to an entirely
alien world of sound.

Sounds Inside was a unique opportunity to take the listener behind bars through sound. In a close collaboration with National Prison Radio (NPR) – based in HMP Brixton, London – I went with former prisoner Carl Cattermole and a set of microphones to spend 24 h behind the prison walls. In a country where prison in the media is either sensationalised or barely acknowledged, *Sounds Inside* aimed to present one of the truest representations of life behind bars.

After spending time working with NPR in Brixton, I was immediately struck by the building's acoustic environment. After asking prisoners whether they had ever considered the soundscape, most said, "that you just get used to it". It was only after prisoners and staff took a moment to somehow remove themselves from the space, that they began to appreciate the effect that the sounds had on them. Some of them were severe; prisoners spoke of the Pavlovian effect of the jingling of officers' keys approaching down the landing. After 23 h behind your

cell door, such an innocuous sound became synonymous with freedom. Ex-prisoners explained how the sound of keys outside jail still evoked this hardwired response.

Whilst this documentary shed light on the deterministic aspect of sound in prison, it did not aim to provide answers. I have since read several academic and official reports on how acoustic design may improve prisoners' well-being. Instead, I intended for this documentary to use the medium of sound to convey how prisoners interacted with a space, and how such a space was maintained. Using unedited recordings of the shouts, screams and the incessant drone of prison that bounced off the harsh concrete surfaces, the documentary highlighted how such a swell of sound contrasted with a lack of care in the prison system. Having been broadcast to both serving prisoners and to those on the outside, I hope that this documentary used the medium of sound to allow listeners to better appreciate an environment on both sides of the prison walls.

To hear the documentary, go to <https://prison.radio/sounds-inside-the-documentary/>

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