

Immersive Dance Experience - Project Proposal

The project:

An immersive movement experience using headphones and live broadcasting to create a sensory journey for participants lasting between one and three hours. The event can work either as a show, using dancers and movers to perform for a general public, or as a fully interactive experience where the general public are both the observers and the performers. We are also particularly interested in examining how virtual reality, location based technology, spatial audio, haptic technology and live broadcasting could be used to significantly upgrade the project scope.

Background:

"And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music."

In 2015, a small group of dancers and circus artists got together to create a silent disco for their friends. With zero budget, the concept was simple: record an mp3 and get everyone to download it onto their own device, then meet up in a park in the evening. Everyone hits play at the same time, and we dance.

Our addition to the basic concept of a silent disco was to include a voiceover along with the music; giving instructions, games and improvisations, ideas for the group to follow if they chose to.

The event was so successful that we repeated at regular intervals, hosting around ten events through 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Over time, the event grew so much that we even had groups joining from other cities, organising their own countdowns and "attending the event" at the same time, in multiple locations across Europe.

We believe several particular elements made the event successful:

- There is something really special about having the music right inside your head, especially at a social event in a public space. It allows a lot of freedom for dance and expression, and helps overcome inhibitions. It feels very strange to take the headphones off, and see everyone dancing and having fun, but all you hear is the shuffling of feet and the occasional laugh.
- It doesn't disturb anyone, so an event can be hosted almost anywhere.
- If you have good quality headphones, you get good quality sound. Normally at silent disco events, the ubiquitous glowing LED headphones themselves are very poor quality, which ruins the experience.
- The interactive element, if people are prepared to play along, brings an additional level of fun and beauty through improvisation and interaction. As the instruction-voice speaks directly inside your head, it feels very easy to follow instructions, if they are delivered clearly.

However, there are several issues with the format, mostly in terms of logistics:

- No one could join in if they didn't have the mp3 already on their device.
- People were 'off beat' if they missed the countdown slightly.
- If an mp3 player paused/stopped for any reason, that person was then out of sync for the rest of the evening.

To move the project forward, we decided to purchase a set of professional Silent Disco equipment, with 50 belt pack receivers and up to 3 channels broadcasting at any time. The participants need only bring their own headphones, and all other issues are removed.

Now that we have this equipment we see many further possibilities to use it in a more artistic manner, and this is where we are looking to get input and support. We could see many of these experiences happening as part of music festivals, dance events and festivals, site specific performance events and also in public spaces. Choosing a public location for the event could be a specific decision to provoke reaction and interaction from the passing public.

<http://www.katapult.berlin>

<http://extrarealisticproductions.com/silently-high/>

Potential Development

We are currently experimenting with one of the simplest expansions of the idea, where participants receive on two or more different channels. This can allow an even richer experience for dancers, movers and performers, once they realise that not everybody is receiving the same choreographic instructions or that perhaps others are not even listening to the same music.

A custom-designed audio experience alongside a VR headset.

Incorporating motion tracking could build the other participants into a VR world, allowing the creation of a separate audiovisual reality that would be portable to any empty space of the requisite size.

This whole concept could be part of a bigger immersive event, where the 'Silent Disco' section of the experience is only a small part. Outdoor performances could be run in a guided tour format, where an MC or a character from the show would lead the audience/participants on a trajectory through the space for the duration of the performance.

Inspirations

Then She Fell - Punchdrunk - NY USA (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ0FKKfxygM>)

Somnai - London (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yzbDKA-D4s>)

Sleep No More - Punchdrunk - NY USA (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k12NZLh_Xvg)

No Fit State Circus - Cardiff (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezEBXinN2vM>)

Secret Cinema - London (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7QJxt6ht_8)

Scarecrow - K'ARTS, Korea (<https://www.sundance.org/projects/scarecrow>)

What Silent Discos Actually Sound Like (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIXCfGkBPJo>)

Artists Involved:

Oli Pinchbeck is a digital project manager turned professional street performer. Having begun his career at some of the biggest digital agencies in London, Oli decided on a split career freelancing as a digital PM and performing on the streets and at festivals across Europe. As a DJ, he has performed at a variety of top festivals and famous venues, often alongside Cameron. In 2016, he co-founded Katapult in Berlin - an independent training and development space for the contemporary performing arts. Over the last four years, he has managed the full project including two complete space renovations, more than one hundred events and performances, artistic residencies and international workshops and masterclasses.

Cameron Murphy is a musician, performer and manager. One of the original masterminds of the project, following the birth of his child he took a step back until his parenting duties lessened. Cameron lives in Helsinki, and is the head of production at Audiodraft - the global audio branding service. He specialises in developing bespoke audio experiences, including the award-winning Soundscape Tasting Experience for Kyro Distillery. With a background in circus, music production and event organisation, Cameron is involved in brainstorming and practical decision making.