SONIC NOTATION PROJECT BRIEF, PHASE I

by Tia Vellani (tiavellani.com)

Welcome to the Sonic Notation Project. We are an ever-changing group of professional musicians and visual artists who are doing an experiment to create a body of work and deepen our individual practices by crossing art forms. We interpret music visually and we interpret art musically.

Music/art crossover is one of the themes in my practice, along with music/art/science crossover. You will find more of my projects by visiting tiavellani.com.

To date, the "SNOrchestra" has included the following people:

Ingrid Anne - fine artist, musician
Julie Cusack - fine artist
Monica Dunne - mixed-media artist
Vicki O'Donoghue - fine artist
Dan Schreiner - composer, musician, visual artist
Jennie Wren - visual artist
Tia Vellani - visual artist, musician, scientist

If you are interested in joining the SNOrchestra, contact me through my website or at tiavellani@gmail.com.

To kick off the project, Dan Schreiner wrote a piece of music with the awareness that it was going to be interpreted visually. It is a lyrical 4-minute piano solo called *Espresso Shot* (we had chosen the unifying concept of "coffee" for this part of the project). On the suggested date of Sept. 21, 2018, Dan uploaded to SoundCloud a live recording of *Espresso Shot* with himself on piano.

https://soundcloud.com/dschrein43/espresso-shot

Subsequently, the visual artists each created, in private, a painting inspired by Dan's piece. We were to focus on a few elements of *Espresso Shot* that spoke to us to create a piece of visual art, knowing that someone would be writing music from it. I was explicit in saying that it wasn't meant to be graphic notation as such; we were not meant to try and represent the music so that someone could play it, but simply with the awareness that someone would be playing it. The first unveiling took place on Hallowe'en, 2018, and more will occur in the months ahead.

Monica Dunne, Electronic Shot, 2018
Ingrid Anne, Sunrise Haze, 2018
Vicki O'Donoghue, Orchestral Manoeuvre in Pink, 2018
Tia Vellani, Zombie Bane®, 2018

I am now opening the project to composers who would like to write music inspired by one of the paintings. I ask that they compose a piece of any duration, without lyrics, in private, without having listened to Espresso Shot (ideally). The piece should be inspired by a few aspects of their chosen painting that have captured their attention, and will be used to inspire visual interpretations. They may record it, provide a MIDI-generated file or anything else, as long as we can hear it. The suggested premiere is 31 December, 2018.

The ethos of the project is to play, mess around, experiment, go nuts, shake off the shackles of social inhibition and dig deep until we find our most open-minded selves. The sense of play is a key component in keeping this project going; it will only work if it feels good.

Suspend judgement of your work. Let me just repeat that. Suspend judgement of your work. The exciting part of the project is the discovery of the different ways that people perceive the same works. The goal, therefore, is to create an authentic interpretation. Consider creating something deliberately ugly as a first pass, so as to boot your inner critic out the door.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF THE SONIC NOTATION PROJECT?

The goal of Phase I is to understand our work at an extremely profound level so we have more control over our choices when creating our art. The project is meant to spark a lifetime of invention and exploration.

The big one for the musicians will be finding informative patterns in our work that are more easily recognised when they are visible. Composers will have, forever, the ability to see our work in the primary properties of visual art, like colour and shape. See below for examples of what I mean by "primary properties".

The big one for the visual artists is similar. We will find informative patterns that draw our attention to the flow of our work and how it is read. We will have, forever, the ability to think about our work in terms of the primary properties of music, like pacing and phrasing.

The goal of Phase II (which I haven't released yet) is to help us recognise and clarify the stories we're trying to tell with our art, and moreover, how to create an emotional journey that will guide our audience through them.

The Sonic Notation Project will allow us to learn from and share with the Other Side, that is to say, the artists working in a medium other than our own. Incidentally, I have no answers. This is an experiment for me as well.

THE SONIC NOTATION PROJECT WILL ENABLE US TO...

-experience our work through senses we don't normally use for that purpose,
-explore music and visual art side-by-side to find the astonishing similarities,
-discover things, other than what we've been doing, that make a piece of art meaningful,
-discover more primary properties of our own medium,
-find new tools and better ways to convey whatever meaning we are trying to convey,
-discover the elements that are holding our pieces together,
-discover additional ways we could be imparting coherence,
-recognise the language we have been using to tell our stories up till now,
-find additional elements available for us to manipulate,
-see what is explicit and what is implied in our work,
-think about the large-scale structures we've been using and the structures we could be using,
-discover the motifs we've been using and find more ways to use them,
-create new ones, entirely different from our habitual set,
-discover creative ways to use motifs and variations from the artists working in the other medium,
-choose the degree of simplicity and elegance we want to use to convey our messages,
-discover how to make our art easier to read with things like repeats, references and relationships.

If any of these points don't make sense, just ignore them. You'll take what you need from the project without getting frustrated and still have the list for future reference.

SOME QUESTIONS WE MAY ASK OURSELVES TO GET THE MOST FROM THE PROJECT:

How do I take advantage of this opportunity to talk to artists working in a different medium?
What can I learn and what can I offer?
How do artists on the Other Side create effects like texture and luminosity? (Conductor's Note: Extreme fun available here!)
What is it about my work that the other artists are attuned to?
What aspects of my work go unnoticed?
What emotional journey do I want to lead my audience through?
How do I do it without words?
How do artists on the Other Side take their audience on a journey?
What primary properties do they use?
How can I use them or their equivalent in my work?
How do the primary properties in my medium correspond with those on the Other Side?
How is meaning created in the other arts?
What elements can I borrow from the Other Side?
What additional factors do I want to use that I haven't been using?
What do they mean in the language of my own art form?
What are the ways in which I can use them?
What journey do I want to create for my audience?
What story am I trying to tell?
What moods, feelings, surprises, senses, qualities will take my audience on the journey?
What else can I use that will make it a better experience for my audience?
How will I create them using my primary properties toolbox?
What do I want the artists on the Other Side to know that I think will be useful to them?
What does my art form have in common with the Other Side?
How do those artists impart coherence to their work?
How do they guide what the audience sees, hears, thinks, feels?
How do they influence how the audience moves and takes action?
What parameters do they manipulate and control?
What tools do they use?
What factors do they alter?
How do the primary properties affect each other? (Conductor's Note: A lifetime of study available here.)
How many primary properties does it take to achieve an effect?
How many licks does it take to get to the centre of a Tootsie Pop®?

Simply ignore the questions you find dull and work with the ones that thrill you. Some of these questions are similar because different people respond to different wording. Keep the list for when you're a different person sometime in the future.

WHAT ARE PRIMARY PROPERTIES?

By "primary properties" I'm talking about the properties, characteristics, elements, manipulatable parameters, variables, qualities or factors that we use in our art and are measurable. These are the tools we use to build mood and meaning into our stories for our audience to interpret as they wish. There are many, many, many more that will be specific to you and your way of working. This list is meant to be freely interpreted by the artist. If something doesn't make sense to you, ignore it. Do

keep the list because you may find it handy in the future.

EXAMPLES OF PRIMARY PROPERTIES OF ART AND MUSIC

-alignment
-articulation
-blending
-change of direction
-colour
-continuity
-curve
-decoration
-density (of information
or marks or voices or
notes or whatever)
-direction
-divergence
-dynamics
-form

-gradient
-hue
-idiom
-key or tonal centre
-layers
-line
-mass
-material
-modulation
-motif
-order
-organisation
-overflow
-pacing
-patterns

-phrasing
-pitch
-placement
-position
-quantity
-randomness
-range
-rate of change
-repetition
-rhythm
-shaping of phrases
-size
-softness
-spacing
-speed

-stroke
-structure
-structure within
structure
-synchronicity
-tempo
-texture
-theme
-tone
-variation
-voices
-volume
-weight

Once again, welcome to the SNOrchestra. I wish you well on your Sonic Notation lifetime adventure.

-Tia Vellani, 2018