

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Institution: Oxford Brookes University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 32, Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory | | |
| Title of case study: Sound Moves: increasing audience engagement through kinetic sound art | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2019 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): Ray Lee | Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Sound Arts | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: [text removed for publication] |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-present | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact Ray Lee's public kinetic sound art projects have had a widespread impact on public engagement with sound art and have influenced arts programming nationally and internationally. His work has also brought benefits to arts festivals and organisations, through the work's unique combination of sound art and kinetic sculpture. Lee's research has led to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the development of three new large-scale public sound art projects; • the touring of these projects to 49 discrete venues nationally and internationally • 511 public performances of the work; • the presentation of the work to a live, in person, audience of estimated to be over 150,000 people worldwide. <p>Lee's work has helped to build awareness and broaden public understanding of sound art as a medium and has contributed to urban regeneration through its inclusion in festivals located in economically disadvantaged areas and areas identified as lacking cultural provision.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research Ray Lee is 'a unique British artist whose work in the field of sound art is internationally significant' (Director of XTRAX, a UK based organisation that supports innovative UK outdoor performance work). He is a previous winner of the British Composer Award for Sonic Art (2012) and received an honorary mention for Digital Music at Prix Ars Electronica (2008). His multi-disciplinary arts projects described in this case study have achieved significant international recognition, with presentations in Australia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, South Korea and across Europe. He is a founding member of the Sonic Arts Research Unit (SARU) at Oxford Brookes University, which is an interdisciplinary group providing a forum for dialogue and exploration in experimental composition and sound art. <p>During this REF period, Lee has undertaken research that builds on <i>Siren</i>, which was the basis of his REF2014 impact case study. This new work has culminated in three significant sound art projects that explore the physical movement of sound through space by means of kinetic sound sculptures, and how this can provoke a sense of wonder in the participating audience. [R1]</p> <p>Chorus <i>Chorus</i> is a 27-minute performance/composition for a set of fourteen five-meter tall tripods with rotating arms, the ends of which carry loudspeaker horns. The rotation of the arms and the resulting physical distribution of the sound emitted from the speakers creates a spatial composition that is constantly changing. Although the form of the work was influenced by <i>Siren</i> the compositional structure was entirely different and the relationship of the performers/ operators to the work and the audience was also different. The work was developed through a practice-based iterative process, working from the relatively smaller <i>Siren</i> tripods to the monumental</p> | | |

Chorus tripods through a series of working prototypes and scratch performances. The composition and sound world was developed in response to both the materials used in the construction and the outdoor locations the work was designed for. *Chorus* was commissioned by Oxford Contemporary Music (OCM) in 2013 and supported by a grant from the Arts Council of England (ACE) also in 2013. [R2] [S5]



Chorus - Photo: Roy Riley 2016



Ring Out - Photo: Wright for GDIF 2020

Ring Out

Building on the success of *Chorus* as an internationally touring sound art project, Lee's *Ring Out* was developed initially in response to a commission from the Performing Rights Society (PRS) Foundation for New Music (GBP20,000). It was shown initially in Hull for the City of Culture 2017 and then outside the Southbank Centre in London for the New Music Biennial Festival [S4]. It received additional funding from ACE (GBP13,000) and from OCM (GBP8,000). In researching and developing the work Lee was concerned with methods for engaging and captivating an audience of up to fifteen hundred people at a time in a predominantly sound-based work. *Ring Out* takes the concept of traditional English Church bell ringing and reimagines it for the twenty-first century as a series of eight five-meter tall towers each with a suspended and pendulous loudspeaker horn. Each tower is 'rung' by a trained operator who makes the speaker swing to and fro. The distinctive movement of sound created by the swinging speakers generates a constantly changing sound world and a dynamic visual spectacle. In researching and developing the work Lee was concerned with methods for engaging and captivating an audience of up to fifteen hundred people at a time. *Ring Out* was commissioned by OCM and funded by PRS New Music Biennial 2017 and a grant from ACE. [R3]

Congregation

The research process for *Congregation* was undertaken over a six-year period starting from a residency at the National Theatre Studio in London in 2012 and culminating in a research and development grant (GBP16,000) from the Without Walls Consortium (Arts Council funded) in 2018. It received additional financial support from OCM (GBP4,000). Commissioned by Norwich and Norfolk Festival and Sea Change Arts the research started from the question: how can an audience be navigated through an unfamiliar location using sound alone? Although also designed for outdoor contexts, *Congregation* differs from *Chorus* and *Ring Out* in that it is directly participatory. The audience (of up to 80 people per show) arrive at discrete locations in a city where they are given a silver sphere and instructed that it will guide them to a location by emitting sounds. As the audience members walk off holding their sonic spheres, they find more people also carrying spheres until the sphere-carrying participants have become a congregation moving inexorably towards their common destination. For the public, the sight of one person after another carrying a distinctive silver sonic sphere creates the sense of being in a performance that is taking place all around them. Uniquely, the mass of 'singing' spheres were used to generate an electronic musical composition at the final location, with the participants being the orchestral players. Lee designed and oversaw the manufacture of one hundred of these interactive spheres, with the software being developed in collaboration with artist and technologist Steve Symons. The project went into production in 2019 as the result of commissions from Norwich and Norfolk Festival, Sea Change Arts and funding from the Without Walls Consortium, and OCM. [R4]

3. References to the research

- R1. Ray Lee website: <http://www.invisible-forces.com>
 R2. *Chorus* (2013), video: <https://vimeo.com/99467393>
 R3. *Ring Out* (2017), video: <https://vimeo.com/246294732>
 R4. *Congregation* (2019), video: <https://youtu.be/lfFZ5Qj9uvU>

4. Details of the impact

Influencing curators and promoters of festivals and venues

One of the principal beneficiaries of Lee's research have been the festivals, venues and the curator/promoters of those festivals. His work has had a lasting impact on curatorial practice and programming philosophy in the outdoor arts sector, with the Director of the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music commenting that "his work has broadened my knowledge of this kind of musical art" [S1a], and the Director of Soundlands stating that programming Ray Lee's work "...has reinforced my belief in our programming ethos" [S1b]. The Director of the Stockton International Riverside Festival notes that Ray Lee "is one of the few artists producing original and interesting digital work for outdoor spaces as opposed to using digital technology as a superior replacement for analogue" [S1c], and the Creative Director of IF, Milton Keynes International Festival states that "the experience of presenting Ray Lee's work has helped in creating an audience for this work as it so well demonstrates creative engagement that can be open to all presented in highly public, non-specialist or elitist venues" [S1d].

Promoters have commented on how programming Lee's work has helped generate a more significant relationship with their target audience. The Director of Soundlands states that, when programming, he seeks "a deeper interaction with the artist and local community, and to develop the artwork in context Ray was happy to do this and the project was immensely enhanced by the additional commission from Ray to create a sound work for the local community" [S1b]. He goes on to say, "*Ring Out* is of a very high standard and its format enabled attendance of relatively high numbers for a timed performance. We often require artwork to be instantly engaging and accessible to a 'general public' audience. *Ring Out* met this requirement, providing an intriguing, eye-catching spectacle in a busy festival environment." [S1b] The Director of XTRAX discusses the advantages to curators of programming Lee's work "Ray's work *Chorus* was selected for many reasons. (...) As a sound/visual piece it can easily be presented in non-English speaking countries – and it is very original, unlike any other work being developed by UK artists working in the outdoor arts sector. All in all it is very tourable internationally, from a practical perspective as well as meeting the highest international quality thresholds." [S1e] While the Director of Lakes Alive (in Kendal and the Lake District) and Wye Valley talks about the confidence she feels in programming Lee's work: "I know Ray's work and trust it to be engaging, well-crafted and presented to a high standard." [S1f]

Promoter/curators and funders have responded very positively to Lee's work as demonstrated by the increased profile that the work has enjoyed, the continued touring of works like *Chorus*, six years after its first performance. The work was programmed for Rijeka, European Capital of Culture, and SPILL festival in 2020 (both postponed because of COVID19) – examples of where the curators have previously programmed Lee's *Siren* project and have now programmed *Chorus*.

Building awareness and broadening public understanding of sound art

Lee's research has had a demonstrable impact on the wider public. At a conservative estimation, an audience of 150,000 people around the world have directly experienced Lee's sound art practice. In the majority of cases, Lee's projects have been presented to the public un-ticketed and free of charge so precise audience figures are hard to gauge. However, audience figures at the festivals where the work has been presented indicate a very high level of attendance in the region of two million. The festivals where Lee has presented his work are, in the main, broad-based arts festivals showing a wide range of art forms, and in many cases Lee's work is the first instance that large scale outdoor sound art work has been shown in these major international contexts. It is also the case that this will have been the first contact that many audiences will have had with sound art. Director of the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music

describes *Chorus* as “art of high aesthetic value, and at the same time available to the public who did not identify with the history of European music. Because it is an outdoor event, calculated for a presentation in a place accessible for everyone, not just for the chosen and the initiated. In addition, it is an attractive, spectacular event, extremely unconventional” [S1a].

Audiences have responded very favourably to Lee’s research-based sound art installations. Visitor feedback has indicated a high level of engagement in a form of work which was previously unfamiliar to them. Audience feedback for *Congregation* included comments such as: “It was amazing, really unique, never done anything like it before”; “For me that was incredible, when we all came together at the end sonically it was so beautiful. I’ve never seen anything like that and I’m inspired” [S2a]. *Ring Out* audiences commented: “This was lovely -other worldly, beautiful” and “really cool, interesting, different, moved me” [S2b]. Audiences at *Chorus* talked about how “You feel enveloped by the sound...you just feel like you’re in some sort of scientific fiction” and “I felt like I was floating and I couldn’t just stand still, I had to wonder around...it was a fascinating experience” [S2c].

As with the other projects listed here *Chorus* has been shown in numerous contexts where the aim of the festival has been to bring high quality contemporary work to economically disadvantaged areas and contribute to urban regeneration initiatives. The Director of Stockton International Riverside festival [S1c] discusses how the work has enabled them to reach economically challenged audiences, but makes the more general point that: “all free open air festivals attract poor and disadvantaged audiences who either can’t afford or feel excluded from traditional venues.” As Director of SPILL Festival of Performance explains, “By siting the work in public spaces, accompanied by an easy to understand invitation to engage, it cuts across age, social divisions and language, to be nothing short of transformative” [S1g]. The Creative Director of IF, Milton Keynes International Festival explains how the choice of a public location made the work “far more accessible and with day and evening presentations really did attract a diverse audience. Outreach work that we had undertaken with schools encouraged children and young people from some of the most economically disadvantaged areas of Weymouth to enjoy the work,” [S1d].

Chorus was displayed in Weymouth Pavilion Forecourt as part of the Inside Out Dorset Festival and b-side festival in 2016. Weymouth Business Improvement District Manager said: “By supporting such an event this builds upon the culture and tourism links which aim to boost the local economy.” [S5] *Chorus* has been presented in Preston, Kendal, and Cheriton (Folkestone), in Deptford, Stratford, Edmonton and Hounslow in London as part of a Circulate London tour, as well as Hull, and Salford, Manchester. Director of Lieux Publics in Marseille describes: “Every time I presented Ray’s work, it was free shows, in public spaces, in working-class neighbourhoods” [S1h]. It reached a wide audience at WOMAD 2014, and at New Scientist Live in London 2015. It has been shown internationally in Australia, France, Romania, Poland, South Korea, Malaysia and Hong Kong. In South Korea *Chorus* was presented in Seoul where Lee also led a three-day sound art and environment workshop at the Seoul Street Arts Creation Centre [S3a].

Chorus has been shown at 38 venues/festivals since its creation in Spring 2013, and 33 venues and festivals since summer 2013. *Chorus*, as a 27-minute performance/composition, has been performed 428 times overall and 393 times since summer 2013. In late 2014 it was shortlisted (as one of a shortlist of three) for the British Composers Awards for Sound Art. An estimated live audience of 130,000 have witnessed the work directly. It was produced with a grant of £49k from the ACE, and financial support from OCM. The international touring of the work was supported by fee payments from festivals and through British Council support direct to the festivals.

Ring Out has been performed 28 times to an estimated live audience of 17,500 people. After the success of *Ring Out* in Hull, it as an exemplar when calling for a new sound art commission in Hull for 2019. *Ring Out* was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in a programme on the New Music Biennial in 2017. It went on to be shown in Oxford (2017), Llandudno (2018) and, for a socially distanced audience, at the Greenwich and Dockland International Festival in September 2020. During 2019 it was presented at nine UK and European festivals. It has had an estimated direct participatory audience of 2,500 and an estimated indirect audience (i.e. members of the public who witnessed the spheres being carried through their town or city) of many hundreds of

thousands [S3b].

Furthermore, Director of XTRAX noted: “*Without Walls* has a touring network that spans many economically deprived areas of the UK, and the support of this network means that *Congregation* will tour to many deprived areas of England in the coming years.” [S1e] So far *Congregation* has been presented in Stockton, Yarmouth, Norwich, Kendal, Greenwich, Hull and Newbury in UK.

Postscript

The devastating effects Covid-19 pandemic caused widespread cancellation of arts activities, including numerous performances of the works described here. However, a sign of Ray Lee’s reputation and significance is that *Chorus* and *Ring Out* were chosen to be part of the Greenwich and Dockland International Festival (GDIF) in September 2020. GDIF was the first major UK festival to take place after the national lockdown during the first half of 2020. “With the larger-scale performances postponed until 2021, there is a far bigger emphasis on durational installations, including... Ray Lee’s astonishing kinetic *Chorus*.” (*The Stage* 25/8/20) [S4] *Chorus* was also presented in Stoke on Trent in October 2020. Senior Producer for arts organisation Appetite in Stoke-on-Trent said: “I’m particularly happy that we’ve been able to host Ray [Lee] here. I’m sorry I couldn’t do more with the weather or the Covid-19 circumstances, but it’s felt even more important to do.” [S1i] In addition, *Congregation* was presented at La Strada Festival in Graz, Austria during September 2020, for a socially distanced audience [S3c].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Testimonials from curators and festival programmers

- a) Testimonial from Director of Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music, Poland
- b) Testimonial from Director of Soundlands, UK
- c) Testimonial from Director of Stockton International Riverside Festival, UK
- d) Testimonial from Creative Director of IF, Milton Keynes International Festival, UK
- e) Testimonial from Director of XTRAX, UK
- f) Testimonial from Director of Lakes Alive Festival
- g) Testimonial from Director of SPILL Festival of Performance, UK
- h) Testimonial from Director of Lieux Publics, France
- i) Testimonial from Senior Producer, Appetite, Stoke-on-Trent, UK

S2. Audience feedback

- a) Extracts from visitor feedback to *Congregation*
- b) Extracts from visitor feedback to *Ring Out*
- c) Extracts from visitor feedback to *Chorus*

S3. Example festival brochures

- a) *Chorus* in Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Korea, Romania, Poland, France and in multiple sites across the UK
- b) *Ring Out* in London, Hull, Newbury and Llandudno, UK, and in France
- c) *Congregation* in Winchester, Stockton, Yarmouth, Norwich, Kendal, Greenwich, Hull and Newbury, UK and in Malta and Austria

S4. Article in leading performing arts publication, *The Stage*, mentioning *Chorus*, August 2020

S5. Example of Lee’s work contributing to urban regeneration through its inclusion in festivals located in economically disadvantaged areas – DorsetECHO news, ‘Spinning metal tripods and giant sculptures: Artist’s work set to wow this weekend’, August 2016