Berklee College of Music

Cosmic Consciousness – The Journey through Body, Mind, & Spirit

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Masters in Music Production, Technology & Innovation

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Abstract

      Cosmic Consciousness is an audio-visual performance exploring the philosophical subject of mortality and whether our consciousness survives bodily death. The artist's interpretation of this paradigm is on its way to the unfolding of the spirit and the self-revelation of divinity in all things. The intention of this project is to provide the audience with a multisensory experience that will resonate on a more expansive level. The performance consists of 3 songs with the inclusion of granular vocal processing as the protagonist giving depth to the abstract visual narrative. Cosmic Consciousness combines ethereal soundscapes through pads and synthesizers combined with electronic and polyrhythmic percussion. The artist hopes her work will inspire and motivate others to actuate their freedom of expression. One of the biggest challenges during this process was pushing limited knowledge on video editing and animation with a short timeline and budget constraints while still representing each visual aspect accurately.

Keywords: audio-visual, interactive art, abstract, vocal processing, philosophical project

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my peers and professors that support my ideas and ambitions so far during my time at Berklee. While studying in Berklee Boston in the undergraduate program, there were many times where I felt these project initial ideas I had accumulated were unobtainable beyond my reach. While reflecting, since receiving my undergraduate degree in Electronic Production & Sound Design, I have already accomplished some of these goals. I produced, sang, and mix engineered a 4 song EP *491*, I was involved in an art installation with Berklee Boston for Nona Hendrix where my visual content was performed alongside the music of my peers, and I created a 3D virtual sound installation *surreal* in Unity.

My next goal is to follow the multimedia domain. I am beyond excited to share the outcome of my countless days of hard work and restless nights where inspiration sparked and creation followed. In regards to our current circumstances my audiovisual performance will now be presented to you online. Once again, thanks to all who have helped me achieve my goals and attributed to an inspiring environment and overall wonderful learning experience at Berklee Valencia.

1. Introduction

Everything is energy. From the electrons spinning around a nucleus, to the salad you had had for lunch, to the stars spinning around in a galaxy. Certain philosophers believe applying intention to energy is how consciousness is created and driven. The three-movement, audio-visual performance is a trajectory that corresponds to the three phases of Evolutionary Consciousness. Initial birth "Natality," death/ dissolution "Release," and a transcendental union of both "Transcendence". This divine cosmic evolution is the progressive manifestation in the definite universe and will be the ongoing theme throughout the artist's performance. The 3 movements will play with the audience's perception of senses as an articulation of human experience. The main purpose of this project is to open the minds of the individual by providing a philosophical framework on the biological status of human evolution and its stages in the evolution of being ascending toward God consciousness, through sight and sound. With the use of multimedia, the interaction with visual art will give depth to how the sonic matter is perceived and can thus constitute important semantic filters.

Figure 1. Still taken from Gum's "Elafonissi" music video[1]

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[1] Gum, "Elafonissi Blue," Spinning Top Music, June 29, 2016, YouTube video, 0:48, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cD27TXoZODY

2. Review of the State of the Art

2.1 Digital Trends

Over the past decade the most important development is the Internet and it's access to various multimedia sites. This digital evolution increased capabilities of delivering a mixture of various media components offering a much broader range of experiences. The Internet is impacting upon the state of musical culture in many ways since it is becoming increasingly easier to access[2]. For example a website site can now stream music and incorporate moving images to better tell the story, or extend the depth of content even more with interactive possibilities such as 360 music videos. In terms of talking about art forms, it is much easier to consume, as they can be experienced right at our fingertips in a matter of seconds. What does this say about our cultural phenomenon? We are growing into this new phase of consumption where we crave more and more to stimulate our senses and keep the engagement/attention. This new way of art consumption isn't necessarily negative; it provides an audience to better understand the artist's true intention of the story they are conveying.

2.2 Strangeloop

Artists who have influenced this project are the likes of Strangeloop and his cinematic-minimalist av interactive EP *fields*[3].This av interactive experience visually describes the topics of life, death and ascension in a more visual, anatomical approach.

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[2] Jamie Sexton. *Music, Sound and Multimedia: From the Live to the Virtual*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 5, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b5k8. EBSCOhost

[3] David Wexler "Strangeloop//" *Fields,* Oct 11, 2019. http://strangelooptv.net

2.3 Alex Grey

Best known for transcendental paintings that present the physical and subtle anatomy of an individual in the context of cosmic, biological and technological evolution.

2.4 Bjork

Bjork's piece "Mouth Mantra," (fig.2) was filmed with 12 cameras from inside her mouth to showcase a 360 VR music video. This abstract approach shows her art as distinctive and extraordinary. Bjork constantly challenges the status quo, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in music, art and technology.
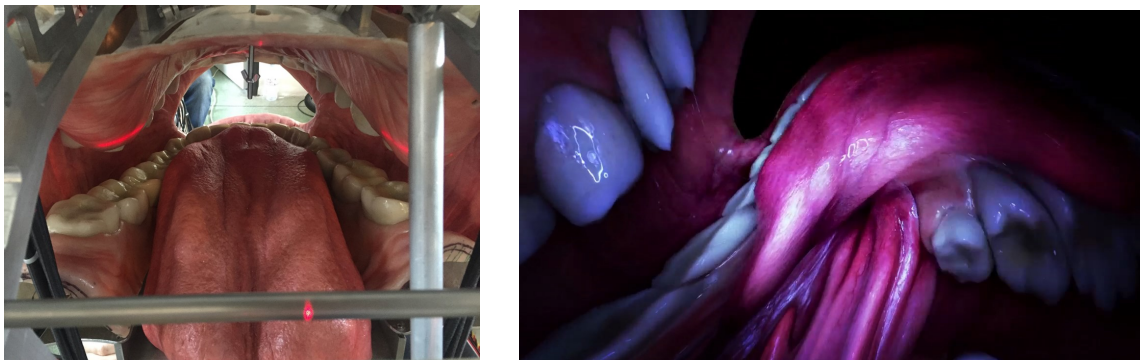

Figure 2. Behind the scenes of Bjork's "Mouth Mantra" video Courtesy of Jesse Kanda.

3. Description

3.1 Concept

Cosmic Consciousness follows the trajectory of conscious evolution in the body, mind and spirit. Starting with initial creation that is the physical state, the body is the box that consciousness comes in.[4]

"Natality" takes the audience through a cosmic evolutional dance starting from the absolute beginning of time, the womb. The concept of this piece starts with sonic

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[4] Alex Grey, director. *How Art Evolves Consciousness. How Art Evolves Consciousness - Alex Grey at TedxMaui 2013*, 28 Mar. 2013, 5:13, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_YJToyOp_4.

frequencies below 800 Hz at sub frequencies emulating the frequency response of what a fetus would hear from inside a womb. The kick being the life force energy of the beating heart. The images follow a theme of pink, linking the anatomical femininity. A spark of molecules is introduced, cells bouncing around as cosmic force comes into fruition. Life is being created. A time lapse of a bean sprout is shown displaying the nodes that branch off to build the root, this image becomes unsettling overtime but represents the discomfort attached to life's initial creation. During the performance a divine voice echoes the process, by the performer, and the anatomical body has taken its shape expressing itself through dance following trance-like movements.

The second movement is the phase of dissolution. The track "Release" corresponds to the death of ego and identity that comes with the mind. Release is an end to earthly suffering. A divine biological process of shedding old skin that one has outgrown. At this point the individual is dissolving from a physical identity about to make the transition into the light body. Granular synthesis is stretching grains of the vocal performance, giving an accurate sonic representation to the image. This concept plays on the idea of taking a biological instrument (the voice) and using an innovative approach to manipulate our perception of reality and showcase it digitally.

The final phase "Transcendence" is the end of the cosmic journey and the reaching of omnipresence's source, striking a feeling of euphoria, a reconnecting of pure spirit. The coming of this higher heavenly dimension is sonically introduced as a string orchestra accompanied with ethereal voices actuated by the performer. This final movement takes the listener to a final epic dance as one would feel crossing over into a dimension and coming of rebirth.

3.2 Technical

      All of the sound is running through Ableton Live and the visual portion is running through Resolume. The Ableton Push and Akai MPC midi were used as controllers for Ableton while Jacob Henbest triggers visuals from his computer on his Machine MIDI controller. Using two dedicated laptops to run each program separately diminishes the risk of CPU crashes. Ideally the artist would prefer having control of both programs simultaneously for purposes of touring individually as a solo act, but due to lack of resources an extra person is performing as the Video Jockey running off of their own laptop.

4. Innovative Aspects

      The subject of Consciousness has been theorized for hundreds and hundreds of years but with the evolution of art and utilization of technology being used in creative ways is how one can be innovative. For example, using granular synthesis on the vocal performance portraying the divine voice in this project would be considered innovative.

5. New Skills Acquired

- 3D animation in After Effects
- Setting up a live performance template in Ableton Live
  - Having a customized session for live playback is important when making decisions on which elements should be played live versus which pre-recordings will be triggered.
- Time management
  - It's important to understand the hours that go into creation of each element of a multimedia performance project. Since this was the

first project wearing all the hats, it was difficult calculating how

many hours went into each microtask. For example, rendering each

visual scene in adobe took twice as long as expected, which cut

into live set prep and rehearsal time.

6. Challenges

- Scaling down live set

  - There was difficulty when deciding what precautions to address in

    the live set, while still wanting to keep an audience engaged

    throughout the performance. Being an electronic performer, the

    artist wants to do more than just stand in the same spot behind their

    controller. Performances where the voice can be utilized as an

    instrument is where the audience's engagement can be kept.

- Making the switch to online performance

  - There is a loss in emotional impact when not experiencing a

    performance in person. To get the full desired effect, audio-visual

    performances ideally would want to be experienced with a large

    high-quality sound system.

7. Future Ramifications

Establishing a team with set tasks in their field of expertise would elevate this

project to it's absolute greatest potential. Ideally the artist should have a ready to go set-

up to tour as a solo act. With this will come with investing in a second laptop dedicated to

running visual content in order to help with computer processing power.

8. Conclusions

As Dada Gunamuktaneda beautifully elaborates, consciousness "is not just an abstract concept, it's about the essence of us all, it's about discovering the greater consciousness within the inner consciousness, realizing our own inner reality as the greater universal reality." The more we expand our sense of being, the more we feel connected to all beings.

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