

Report to Langara Research Committee from Catherine Lee

Respectfully submitted October, 2013

In Feb 2012, I requested funding to support the furtherance of my three artistic projects, which is how I spend all my professional time outside teaching at the college. These are ***Upaya***, ***Ladies' Aires and Dances*** and ***The Compleat Courtier***. I describe the development of each piece on separate disks. This document describes the Upaya development.

Upaya is a Vocal Body installation work. A what????

Definitions:

Vocal Body performance: Vocal Body performance works combine contemporary music, theatre, dance, visual arts and poetry, and require skill in dance, singing, improvisation and acting. I have been developing this combination since graduation in dance and theatre from Queen's and York Universities. I'm the only person I know who creates works such as these, partly because most dancers don't sing, most singers don't dance and most actors don't have enough technique in either to do this work. Musical theatre performers prefer more "popular" style musicals to the contemporary bias of Vocal Body. Because I require "triple threat" performers, I'm fortunate that several have worked extensively with me over a long period.

Installation Work: a performance based around a physical object portable enough to be "installed" virtually anywhere. There is also usually a combination of media. In this case we combine an inflatable sculpture, visual projections (of paintings, "found" images of nature and the universe and a manipulated video of a woman speaking about time) with live vocal production by the movers, recorded sound bites and in one performance, live saxophone. This is my first complex technology piece.

Description of Upaya

Upaya (oo-pie-a), translated from Sanskrit as "expedient means" is an international, collaborative, interdisciplinary installation work using an inflatable kinetic sculpture (the Dome), artwork, audio-visual digital media (video projections and audio scores), Vocal Body performance and interaction with the audience. Voice work stems from choral, jazz, classical and musical theatre as well as extended vocal sound.

The first costumes and the inflatable kinetic sculpture (the "Dome") were designed and built by our international collaborator Evelyn Roth, a renowned Canadian fabric artist now living in Australia.

The Dome's white surfaces act as highly mutable neutral screens and flexible interactive environments for the performers, who move on top, around, inside and under the sculpture.

The live mix of projected visual digital media include images from paintings by Angela Brown, solid colours, live super-imposition, pre-recorded, manipulated video clips and live line drawing by Angela Brown.

The live mix soundscape contains recorded digital media ranging in tone from natural to synthetic sound combined at times with live saxophone and pitch riding.

Description of Upaya cont

The “Dome” (see accompanying photos) is made of parachute material with a long tube connecting it to a “wind” source, 4 sets of face, foot and arm appendages, and two “pods” which the performers may enter and animate with their entire bodies.

Performers animate the dome from inside as well as from outside. To date, all video projections have been onto the outer surface of the dome. We are experimenting with lights from inside the dome, and have a plan for projections from inside.

Upaya has been made of a series of performance “scores”, not necessarily presented in the same order each time the work has been shown. Each “score” has been created from the performers’ experiments with the sculpture, props, costumes and one another, input from video and audio contributors and audiences.

Upaya specifically explores human relationship with the earth and mortality. Avoiding “bashing people over the head with the message”, we hope to subtly affect peoples’ awareness of their personal interconnectivity with the natural world and their fellow humans.

The style of the piece is slow moving and transformationally evolving. Nothing is static. The piece works subliminally on the imaginations of the audience. They extrapolate personal metaphors from the piece as well as more Universal themes.

Our hope is that audiences leave our presentations heartened, inspired and enlightened. We would love them to be inspired to take action in whatever way is appropriate to their lives to improve the lot of their fellow humans and that of nature around us.

Once the work is fully developed, we will present it at the Dance Centre and hopefully with help from Made in BC we will take the work on tour. The piece can be performed in a wide variety of venues from a longhouse to a school gym to a proscenium theatre.

Work Accomplished Prior to Receipt of LRC grant

I have worked on Upaya since I received grants from LRC and the Dance Centre for explorations in 2008. We developed about 10 different “sketches/scores” of ideas for the work. We proceeded to present various combinations of these ideas over three years, when requested, for public events.

I have received funding from Gaming Commission almost every year, but we have not had enough money at any given time to develop these sketches to their fullest potential.

Each time we presented the work, we did so in the form of improvised “scores”. We had a general shape for each “score” and as the performers are good improvisers, the work held improvised integrity, but not specific repeatability.

During 2011, with gaming funds, we built three dresses and created a twenty minute audio-visual projection sequence on Final Cut Pro.

I now needed to spend time refining the different live performance “scores” in terms of both movement and vocalizations.

How the LRC funds were used.....

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Langara College Research funds assisted the refinement of movement/vocal scores for 2 sections of *Upaya* and the development of the projections sequence during the summer of 2012.

For the movement component, I hired three performers, two of whom I had worked with before. As the piece is a trio, this allowed me to be the “outside eye” which I had never been able to do before, having always been one of the improvisers.

I also hired an Audio-Video composer to help establish an augmented and more complex projection sequence. Although some of the work can be developed independently from the AV composer, it is essential that this person is with us in the studio much of the time in order to integrate the projections with the Vocal Body material.

With the money from this grant I developed (in 15 hours) two specific segments that we have named “the masked demons” and the “drowning sequence”. I hired a videographer to capture the results of this refinement so we can reference it for rehearsals prior to further performances. The video was cut short by time constraints and the camera was unable to “see” in some sections because of the lighting, so it was less satisfactory than I had wished as a record of what we accomplished.

I also met with the Audio Visual artist/composer separately and we explored new visual possibilities and honed the sequence we already had. We came up with two totally new ideas – the lava flow and bubbling mud!

After the LRC funding was spent, we were able to further explore these in the studio in fall 2012 with subsidized studio rental at the Dance Centre and to develop a beginning sequence for the piece.

I look forward to the completion of this project in the near future. Some sources of funding were not forthcoming, so again the project has been slowed down. However, the LRC grant still put us on our way to “Fruition”!

Thank you to the committee members and to the Faculty association for this opportunity to get closer to my dream!

Sincerely
Catherine Lee

Start up and Completion Dates (Actual and Planned) and Notes on Other Support

July 2013 *Upaya* -15 hours of refinement using LRC Funds,
October-Novemeber 2013 for development (Dance Centre studio subsidy)
2013/14 presentation *Upaya* at Dance Centre using City of Vancouver Funds and Vancouver Foundation funds).

Support of touring prep (funds Vancouver Foundation, City of Vancouver).

Tours to follow in 2013 fall and/or 2014 spring supported by Vancouver Foundation, and Made in BC Vancouver Foundation for support to develop four other sections. Dance Centre as a production space. Made in BC to supporter a tour of BC and beyond.

City of Vancouver to assist production of *Upaya* at the Dance Centre.

BC Gaming Commission to assist artistic completion, production and admin support.



The angry gods





Drowning

