

Notes From Workshop #21: Let's Face The Music

OCTOBER 27, 2015

From Workshop Announcement:

For the sake of argument let's assume the following: When many (most?) of us talk about or envision a new work of art in a public place, most likely the focus is on some kind of visual expression.

- 1 *Is music as public art different from music as performance? If so, how? If not, why not?*
- 2 *If there are differences, what are the ways in which – to pick up how Robert Irwin frames art in a public place – "you can take [musical] art out into the world?"*
- 3 *Given #2, what are, or what could be, the complementary roles or skills sets of, e.g., a musician, a composer, a community leader, a municipal agency, a producer, etc.?*
- 4 *Ultimately, what – if anything – needs to happen to ensure that music is incorporated more explicitly in the common understanding of "public art"/"art in a public place?"*

Helping to lead the band was: **Mike Avitabile**, arts administrator/director of [Hub New Music](#); **Maria Finkelmeier**, composer and founder/director of [Kadence Arts](#); **Mike Hardin**, percussionist; **Erik Holmgren**, Mass Cultural Council's program manager for [Creative Youth](#); **Jon Sakata**, concert pianist, installation artist, and instructor at [Phillips Exeter Academy](#).

Lillian Hsu, Cambridge Arts Council, opened the meeting with a question: "What is the monetization of disembodied art?" In other words, how are not-for-sale, specifically uncommercial arts being monetized in our society?

Ben Bruce, who, with his colleague Greg MacGlashing, has been designing the ArtsCommons (the subject of November's workshop, was quick to remind us of art's inherent capacity for collaboration across mediums and disciplines. Dan Beyer similar emphasized the need for busking-specific infrastructure in Boston.

Some characteristics of music as public art:

- Free
- Easily engaged with
 - If it is public, people need to feel that there are no boundaries and they have the ability to walk up and interact (participatory vs. non-participatory performance/public art)
- No set time during which the engagement is scheduled
- Has to happen in space: public space needs to be there to accommodate musical public art

Not long after preliminary discussion got underway Jon Sakata (installation/music artist and teacher) asked us to interrogate terms like “public,” “music,” and said a personal goal was to investigate alternatives. Rob Trumbour (Khoura Public Art) spoke, too, about otherness and the public, asking us “Who are we excluding by talking amongst ourselves?”

Erik Holmgren of the Massachusetts Cultural Council’s YouthReach initiative sharpened our focus, stressing the (less obvious) need to “speak the language” of Greater Boston’s heads of government and policy makers; these are, after all, people who typically place taxation and corporate welfare over the public’s less easily perceived needs—access to arts!

Ken Field, from the Honk! Festival, cut to the chase, asking: “What is the problem we’re trying to solve?”

Some questions to be resolved

- Artists’ intentions and interaction with all other elements
- What is specifically social about music?
- What in the arts appeals to policy makers?
- Releasing the barrier of the financial requirement to perform the art.
- Accessibility
- Familiarity
- “But what if I don’t want to listen?!?!” (vs. visual art, where there’s an option not to look at it!)
 - Speakers (Bluetooth)
 - It does end
- Everyone seemed to agree Public Art requires: free admission and variable length of participation. Jon said public art resembles the museum, in that people come and go according to their degree of interest, as they do looking at a painting. Maria Finkelmeier of Kadence Arts championed both participatory and non-participatory performance art, and stressed the ubiquity of music in everyday life. Exposure to the various arts throughout one’s upbringing, Maria suggested, naturally leads one to expect it for future generations, particularly with regard to the public school system.

What is the value of the “art” to the public, to the artists and to the politicians?

- What are the common languages?
 - Speak the language that resonates, when talking about, e.g., funding
 - Need to be able to articulate the value of art to the people with whom we’d like to work
- Possible issues for policy-makers:
 - College readiness
 - Truancy

- Crime rates
- Economic Development

Lillian and Jon continued to remind us of the perceived need for “authenticity” in the arts. How is it conveyed, and is it necessary? How does a venue (e.g. ticketing, membership) affect public art? Everyone was asked: consider the difference between open and curated public art.

Looking for public spaces

- o Dedicated Space pros and cons
 - o DCR
 - Re Zakim Bridge: Understand infrastructure capabilities/limitations (there, and elsewhere!)
 - o Greenway Conservancy
 - NO SOUND ISSUES
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Models that may/or may not work:

- Montreal 2 -3 MM has invested in public art :
 - <http://www.btmq.qc.ca/en/news/art-public-montreal/>
 - <http://artpublic.ville.montreal.qc.ca/en/about/>
- From the Honk! Festival
- o No vendors, which helps local businesses
- El Sistema:
 - <https://www.lsa.umich.edu/UMICH/orgstudies/Home/Current%20Students/OS%20Honors/Past%20OS%20Honors%20Theses/FINALJonathan%20Hulting-Cohen%20Thesis.pdf>
- NYC Jazz in Colors
 - <http://jazzandcolors.com/centralpark/>
- Vinyl in London
- Water Fire in Providence
- Group Muse
 - o Pros: Spontaneity
 - o Cons: Only reaches a certain demographic

Take-aways/challenges/next steps

- BostonAPP/Labs Band: The Boston APPtet
- Directory: how to set that up and keep it live
- Call Renata von Tscherner, Charles River Conservancy, for links to DCR in order to take advantage of/access the Zakim; contact new Director of External Affairs at DCR
- What is the Brand...?