

## Preview

### **360 Degrees of Sight + Sound — The Planetarium Project on February 25**

by Carlyn Kessler



On February 25, the experimental spectacle “360 Degrees of Sight + Sound: The Planetarium Project” will be presented at 9:00 pm and 9:45 pm at the Nathan and Fannye Shafran Planetarium of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. This unique project, currently in its second season, combines the talents of students from the Cleveland Institute of Music and Cleveland Institute of Art, who collaborated to produce animated films with musical scores, which audience members will experience in a 3D format in the museum’s state-of-the-art planetarium.

“This is not commonly done,” remarked Steve Kohn, electronic music professor at the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM), who served as the musical supervisor on the project. “This is very special.” Indeed, the event creatively conjoins the three institutions in a colorful display of the interactive arts mecca that the community has become. As Kohn went on to say, “University Circle is a cultural jewel.”

In a recent conversation, Keith Fitch, head of CIM’s composition department, shed light on the original conception of the project. In 2011, the planetarium was newly upgraded with SkySoft equipment. Astronomy Programs Coordinator Jason Davis approached the CIM composition department in hopes that a “unique experience” could develop.

Fitch and Kohn subsequently directed their attention to the Cleveland Institute of Art (CIA), hoping to formulate a multimedia collaboration. They approached Kasumi, video artist and professor at CIA as well as a 2011 Guggenheim fellow recipient. Fitch explained that the three decided to “pair composers with filmmakers to project film on the planetarium.”

Thus, in February 2012, the Planetarium Project was born. Fitch noted that the process of creating the ultimate five minutes of film was much longer for the filmmakers than the composers due to the “demands of the technology.” The artists “[created] film on the 2D monitor” but “[had] to imagine it in 3D.”

For the 2014 show, each composer was assigned a “[team] of artists” to provide for a more time-efficient process. There are five composers involved in the project, hence five

composer/artist teams. The composers had the unique experience of, as Kohn calls it, “pre-scoring” the films, or writing the soundtrack before the creation of the films.

Fitch described the creative process. All of the program participants met together and the composers submitted samples of their work. The artists then selected composers according to their style and personality, thus the “artists self-gravitated toward the music they liked.” The composers completed their work by October 2013, allowing enough time for the artists to create the films to fit the music. As a result, this seemingly “backward” sequence of events fostered inspired partnerships.

Kasumi, who supervised one of the five teams, said, “The challenge in guiding the art students was multilayered: encouraging them to retain their own artistic integrity while weaving their own artistic vision together with that of the composer with whom they were paired. And all while fulfilling the very challenging technical specifications that a dome projection requires.” Of her participation, Kasumi said, “I’m delighted to have been part of this exciting project, and am confident that the program will be a rich and varied experience for viewers of all ages.”

All of the composers involved had previously completed Kohn’s yearlong electronic music class, which provides students with the skills to create film scores. Kohn noted that the electronic music studio at CIM is equipped to be a “powerful work station in which composers can generate music very quickly and surgically construct pieces.”

Kohn ensured that the scores would be “distinctly different from each other.” The composers were also matched with members of the CIM audio department in order to do “surround mixes” of their finished compositions. This step, Kohn added, provided yet “another level of collaboration” in the project. The finished, sub-mixed audio tracks were then handed off to CIA and the planetarium.

Alex Cooke, a composition master’s student at CIM and one of the five composers in the project, said that “having the opportunity to compose a piece specifically with surround sound in mind allowed me to experiment with textural and spatial effects, creating a more enveloping experience for the listener. In turn, the way in which the video artists have embraced the unique nature of the dome has been truly astounding; the experience is entirely immersive.”

Cooke continued, “Most of all, seeing the way in which the visual and aural components complement, encourage and enhance one another served as a powerful demonstration of the beauty of collaboration. Very often, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.”

*Published on clevelandclassical.com February 17, 2014*