

Oberlin's Gratitude Showers Challenge begins with Monday broadcast

by Jarrett Hoffman



A group of students at Oberlin College and Conservatory are spreading gratitude and raising funds for healthcare professionals at University Hospitals Elyria Medical Center, all in a distinctly creative way.

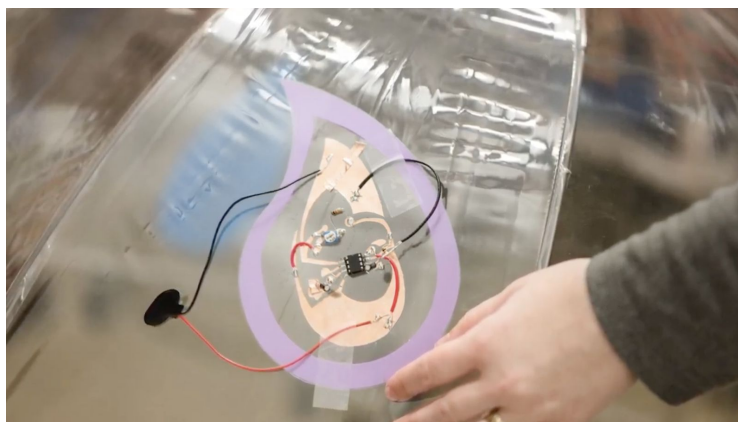
On Monday evening, the Gratitude Showers Challenge kicked off with a broadcast on YouTube from 7:15 to 10:00 pm. I watched the first 40 minutes, which began with Abby Aresty and her students in the course Sonic Arts in Society explaining their project and how people can participate.

Stated most simply, they're gathering notes of gratitude — a few words, or even a picture — from the public that will then be shared with hospital workers. They're also asking for donations of \$1 for each message received, up to their goal of 100 messages.



The messages will be written out on raindrop-shaped cuts of vinyl, and once it is deemed safe, installed on clear umbrellas that will make up an art installation in a courtyard at the Hospital.

Those pieces of vinyl are being called “sundrops,” with the idea that the messages will bring a bit of sunshine to those who need it, and cast shadows through the umbrellas when the sun shines overhead. The umbrellas will also be equipped with solar-powered “sundrop circuits” made by Aresty and her students — here’s where the technological aspect of the class comes in — so that when the sun shines, the umbrellas will emit gentle sounds of rain.



Michael Gaspari, one of four student research assistants supporting the class, was responsible for a short video about the project that was played during Monday’s broadcast, and is available on the project’s [website](#). It includes animations and original music — ethereal sounds that brilliantly and subtly capture the metaphor of this whole project: sunshine in rainy times, and the balance between sadness and gratitude.

“We all tried to convey the complicated feeling of having hope during dark times,” Gaspari told Erich Burnett for an [article](#) on Oberlin’s website. (That article also delves more deeply into the complicated path this initiative has taken — born out of a Winter Term Project, and adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic.)

A second piece of music shared during the broadcast also came with a complex history — one that also involves umbrellas.

Recently, the Sonic Arts in Society class visited through Zoom with a local children’s choir, the Oberlin Choristers Cantate Musica Ensemble, and began collecting messages of gratitude. That was not Aresty’s first contact with the Choristers. Last

fall, students in another course she teaches visited the children and recorded them making different rain sounds, to be played from small speakers attached to umbrellas.

Gaspari and another student research assistant, Maya McCollum, then created a video with music composed of edited versions of the children's rain sounds, set against images of their hand-made sundrops. The impressive [result](#) is a hypnotic, groovy, percussive arc of sounds undergirded by a deep, imposing bass line.



As of Monday night, Aresty's class has collected 40 sundrop messages out of their goal of 100. Messages can be submitted via the project's [website](#) or the Twitter handle @GratefulShowers.

If you'd like to make your own sundrop, watch this tutorial [video](#).

You can donate to UH Elyria Medical Center's COVID-19 Community Response Fund [here](#).

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