

Project title: Charlottesville Covid Arts Time Capsule

Collaborators: Nathan Moore (WTJU Radio), project lead
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Alan Goffinski (The Bridge Progressive Arts Initiative)
Nomi Dave (faculty, Music)

ABSTRACT

WTJU will work with Nomi Dave's Musical Ethnography class and The Bridge PAI to build an arts time capsule documenting the experience of COVID-19 in Charlottesville. Important national organizations are creating time capsules to document and archive the living history of the past year, but none at the local level. This time capsule will be presented virtually as a website, on-air on WTJU 91.1 FM, and physically as a mobile micro-museum. University students will be involved at each stage of the project – from research to curation to presentation to public events. All of these presentation formats are adaptable to different levels of pandemic restrictions during the 2021-22 academic year.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As has been widely documented, the global pandemic has devastated arts scenes across the world, with performances, exhibits, and events canceled, venues closed, and artistic livelihoods and opportunities greatly reduced. The scourge of the virus along with a renewed reckoning with racism and white supremacy in the US have left many artists feeling exhausted and spent. As Charlottesville-born musician Harli Saxon recently told us, "Sometimes it feels like art doesn't matter at the moment."

At the same time, however, the arts have endured and evolved over the past year in some creative and resilient ways. For example, festivals and venues have adopted new online and distanced formats or have refocused on outdoor public projects. Artists have used their creative talents to explore more deeply questions around race, gender, violence, isolation, and community. Moreover, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, stories resounded of the arts in everyday life – from neighborhood sidewalk-chalk paintings to singing across balconies to digital choirs and knitting collectives.

This project documents the recent stories and experiences of local artists in Charlottesville since early 2020, through the creation of an arts time capsule. Organizations such as the Social Science Research Council and the National Library of Medicine have recently created time capsules to document and archive the living history of the past year, with repositories of images, videos, health documents, and media stories. These projects reflect the importance of shaping history and public memory in the present, both as a means of reflecting on lived experiences contemporaneously and as a resource for framing future knowledge. As the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes, the history that is collectively remembered depends on "a competitive process by which values are defined, images of

transactions contrived, and interpretations of a situation successfully imposed by one party on others” (1981: 202-3).

Who will shape this process today? As members of society have continually asked over the past year, how will this moment be remembered? What will the history books say about 2020-21 and what will be forgotten? As Charlottesville has grappled – at times violently – with debates around public history and collective memory in recent years, we need to continually be intentional about creating open, inclusive mechanisms for community remembering. Our project addresses these needs by focusing on the local arts scene as a lens to explore creative moments, individuals, struggles, pain, grief, humor, and survival in an extraordinarily volatile context.

We propose two versions of the time capsule: a virtual and a physical one. The virtual one will be an online, living repository of audio recording, video, photographs, and text, housed on its own website and maintained long-term by The Bridge PAI and WTJU.

The physical time capsule will be based on objects and recordings collected from artists and community members, along with accompanying text describing their significance. This collection will be housed in a new WTJU micro-museum, to be built in our converted camper and repurposed from its recent use as a mobile studio. If this grant proposal receives full funding, we plan to host this mobile exhibit in different locations in Charlottesville from September to November 2021, along with community programming at The Bridge and at WTJU’s studio and performance space. The micro-museum will change location to facilitate equitable access to all community members. If this grant proposal receives our lower funding request, we will hold a number of events and open museum days throughout the fall at its parked location at WTJU’s studios.

We will work with student curators, as well as a professional website designer to build and manage the virtual site. Our community programming (contingent on Covid restrictions being lifted) will involve events for children and adults to hear directly from local artists and to contribute their own reflections and memories on events and experiences from the past year. We will document these live events, which will eventually be part of the virtual time capsule.

WTJU will also produce and broadcast a series of sonic IDs – short, interstitial audio clips featuring a diverse range of local artists’ voices, recounting key memories and experiences. This work will collectively help us as a community make sense of the moment we are living through.

This project stems from student-led work in Nomi Dave’s undergraduate course, Musical Ethnography. As part of the College of Arts & Sciences’ Civic and Community Engagement program, the course is a yearlong class that combines classroom-based learning on the methods and ethics of community-based research, along with creative projects and collaborations with a handful of local artists. In 2020-21, the students turned their work towards documenting the stories of local artists under Covid. Their (ongoing) projects include a short film, a podcast, a photo essay, and a text collage, which will provide some

initial content for the virtual time capsule. The idea for the time capsule is one that the students themselves came up with, in particular UVA undergraduates Noelle Buice, Catherine Moore, Andrea Tache Lopez, and Ben Trombetta.

If funding is successful, at least three of the students will continue working on this project beyond this academic year. Through the present proposal, we plan to expand on the students' initial work by increasing the number of artists involved, while ensuring a diverse and representative range of individuals, groups, and art forms. Partnering with WTJU and The Bridge PAI both addresses the central goals of the Civic & Community Engagement program, by connecting community and University members, and allows the project to be more directly shaped by local partners. As a community arts organization, The Bridge has been leading local artistic responses to Covid since early 2020, including programs such as Art Apart, Quarantine Haikus, and the Charlottesville Emergency Relief Fund for Artists. As Charlottesville's leading community radio station, WTJU has been hosting discussions, creating playlists, and spreading public information about community resources and experiences throughout this time.

In Summer 2021, we will hold consultative meetings with all collaborators, including key artist-partners who are already involved, to have an open and inclusive process to continue designing and developing our ideas for next year. Artist-partners, as well as staff at WTJU and The Bridge PAI, will serve as a community advisory board for the project to ensure that it is responsive to the needs and interests of the local community in reflecting on the past year and continuing present.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This project involves three key learning objectives:

- Collaborative design and community curation
- University-community engagement
- The importance of the arts to public memory

PROGRAMMING & EVENTS

Launch event in September 2021

Micro-museum exhibit with weekend public visiting hours, September – November 2021

Concert(s) and children's event

Radio Sonic IDs series

Panel discussion in Spring 2022

WORK PLAN

Summer 2021

Consultative meetings with collaborators and community members, for planning and design for 2021-22

Research, collection, and documentation by student assistants

Work on converting the camper/mobile studio to a micro-museum

Building website for virtual time capsule

Fall 2021

September: Launch event for physical and virtual time capsule

September to November: Physical time capsule, open weekend hours TBA

Community programming of live events at WTJU and The Bridge PAI

Launch of WTJU's time capsule sonic IDs series

Spring 2022

Conclusion of WTJU Sonic IDs series

Panel event at UVA with key collaborators to discuss experiences and results from the project

BIOGRAPHIES

Nathan Moore (General Manager, WTJU) has worked in college and community radio for more than two decades. At WTJU, he oversees the content and operations of on-air and online media platforms, manages WTJU staff and volunteers, ensures that WTJU content serves the public, and develops institutional relationships and collaborations within UVA and in surrounding communities. During his tenure at WTJU, he has built, organized, and launched WXTJ 100.1 FM UVA student radio, the Virginia Audio Collective, and the Freefall Music Festival. Nathan also serves as the president of the board of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters.

Heather Mease (PhD student, Department of Music) is a composer and graduate student at the University of Virginia whose work focuses on the appropriation of media, recorded materials, and found objects as a means for exploring material culture, waste, and the consequences of nostalgia. As staff at the Bridge Progressive Arts Initiative, Heather works to build connections between music making within the university and the Charlottesville community through concert and event organizing.

Alan Goffinski (Executive Director, The Bridge Progressive Arts Initiative) organizes artists, thinkers, and doers to develop and implement community-driven arts and cultural experiences that serve Charlottesville. He also serves as director for The Charlottesville Mural Project and director of fun for the Charlottesville CreativeMornings chapter. Alan also pursues freelance songwriting and sound design opportunities.

Nomi Dave (Associate Professor, Department of Music) has taught in the College's Civic & Community Engagement program since Fall 2018. She has conducted community-based research on voice, sound, and politics in Conakry, Guinea since 2009. She is currently also involved in a collaborative project on voice and gender justice in Charlottesville and at UVA, with faculty, students, and community advocates.