

Sonifying COVID | 2022

Sonifying COVID by **Diana CHESTER**, created in collaboration with **Julian BELBACHIR**, **Benjamin CAREY**, **Luke HESPANHOL**, **Sonya HOLOWELL** & **Melody LI**, is an exhibition that focusses on art made from and about the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on how sound as a tool of expression and vibration can shed light on the “other” somatic impacts of the pandemic - the bodily anxiety, stress, and tension we internalize. This exhibition is sound forward, using sonification and vibration as the nexus that brings together two independent but interrelated works both created from data of the pandemic over the last two years.

Gallery25

Opening Event: 7 Sept 5pm - 7pm

To be officially opened by Associate Professor **Lyndall ADAMS** at 5.45pm

Exhibition dates: 8 Sept - 6 Oct 2022

ACDC Floor Talk: 7 Sept 12.30 - 1.30pm

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am - 4pm

Building 10, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

ECU Galleries acknowledges the traditional custodians, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and elders past, present and emerging. We pay our respects for the great privilege of living, making and researching on these unceded lands.

Artist Statement

Sonifying COVID is an exhibition that focusses on art made from and about the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on how sound and vibration as tools of expression, can shed light on the “other” somatic impacts on the pandemic. By ‘other’ the artists mean not the physical symptoms of COVID-19, but rather the bodily anxiety, stress, and tension we internalize by listening to the news, remembering to wash our hands often, and incessantly checking apps and web maps for new information and details of hotspots, numbers of infections, and so on. The exhibition is sound forward, using sonification and vibration as the nexus that brings together two independent but interrelated works both created from data of the pandemic over the last two years.

Pandemic Resonance by Diana Chester, Melody Li, Julian Belbachir, Sonya Holowell and Benjamin Carey, is a meditation, an experimental sound-forward, dialogue free experience about living through COVID. The work explores the environmental impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on people’s emotional and physical well-being, while offering a soothing counterpoint to the constant bombarding we all face in the news. This counterpoint comes in the form of the healing vibrational power of music. As a black screen fades in and out on short snippets of the lives of Sydneysiders in Isolation during the pandemic, the piece offers the audience a space to project their own memories and experiences of the pandemic into the soundscape that envelops them.

Parsing the Pandemic is a sound and visual work that explores the Johns Hopkins University Data on COVID-19 case numbers worldwide from 2020. This is a collaboration between three artists, Diana Chester, Benjamin Carey and Luke Hespanhol, who have taken this raw data set as their starting point to generate work that creatively explores the relationship between the data and their lived experience of the pandemic. The work consists of two quadraphonic fixed media soundscapes, *Transmission* and *Isolation*, and a video diptych *Permanent Hypnagogia*.

Permanent Hypnagogia by Luke Hespanhol, consists of a video diptych: each half offers a complementary subjective perspective of an individual in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic: passively looking out into the world, and into himself. The whirlwind-like graphics generated on top of the movies are driven by the Johns Hopkins University data on COVID case numbers worldwide from February to May 2020. The viewer is thus positioned in the centre of an experience of dizziness in face of the relentless statistics of cases, deaths, vaccinations rates and escalating crises. At that stage of the pandemic, every case corresponded to great suffering, often a life lost. The artwork conveys the feeling of a permanent shift between being awake and dreaming – a state known as hypnagogia – bearing in mind that dreams are not always nice, and within which judgements are often suspended amidst surreal imagery.

Transmission by Benjamin Carey, is a quadrophonic fixed media work that makes use of COVID-19 infection data from 2020, as well as audio from a press conference of the World Health Organisation from the same period. Datasets of infection rates from eight countries of interest (USA, UK, China, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and Brazil) were used as sonification parameters to generate all sound synthesis, concatenative re-synthesis and audio processing in the work. The sonification imbues the speech of journalists and members of the scientific community with the statistical reality of rising and falling daily case numbers, at a time when the

WHO, and the scientific community at large, were grappling with the nature of asymptomatic transmission at this early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Transmission Credits: WHO Press conference - 8/6/2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZolOyiZnt8> Voices: Emma Farge (Reuters), Dr Maria Van Kerkhove (WHO), and members of the WHO scientific community.

Isolation by Diana Chester, is a 4-channel piece that uses COVID-19 data expressed as polyphonic MIDI, and newsreels of reporting on the Pandemic to develop a narrative about isolation and loneliness. This work explores COVID case numbers throughout Australia and from 10 countries around the world from the viewpoint of when COVID was first explored, and we all sat back and watched the news as the world became very closed and we all retreated to our own spaces. This work uses the data as a starting point to generate music, sounds, and noise that when coupled with voice tell the story of looking at the Pandemic from the inside out, as we all did.

Artist Bios

Dr **Diana CHESTER** is a scholar and artist from New York whose work produces critically influential studies, methods, and outputs that use sound to traverse disciplinary boundaries using feminist, de-colonial, and post-anthropocentric approaches to thinking and making. Chester draws from sound studies, archival studies, and ethnography and relies on field recording and composition to explore sound in diverse contexts by putting research and practice in direct conversation—deepening the capacities of both. Chester holds a lecturer role in Media and Communications at the University of Sydney, is editor of *Interference Journal*, and on the board of the World Listening Project.

<https://dianachester.com/>

Sonya HOLOWELL is a vocalist, composer, writer and educator of Dharawal/Inuit descent. Her work spans many contexts and takes multiple forms, with improvisation as a primary modality. Sonya is co-founder and previous editor of online arts publication *ADSR Zine*. Recent projects include the *duos Sumn Conduit* with Ben Carey, *holowell* with Jonathan Holowell and *Danger/Dancer* with James Hazel. She is on a new threshold of personal, expository work.

Julian BELBACHIR'S journey began with a pursuit to master the craft of African percussion playing and instrument making for which he extensively travelled West Africa in Guinea, Senegal and Morocco, studying with some of Africa's most respected masters. As a child he was taken under the wing of master drummers and griots. He further honed his craft by training and studying with members of Percussion de Guinea as well as the internationally acclaimed Ballet Africains and the infamous djembe group 'Bockka Juniors.' Julian has extensively studied the instrument making traditional instruments such a Kamel N'goni Djembe, Dundunba, Kora, Balafon, Guembri.

<https://www.julianbelbachir.com/>

Melody LI is an award-winning artist with over 15 years of experience in animation and has extensive knowledge of design and film production. She has worked with artists and musicians for exhibitions, films, stage design, public art, and many other festivals. Melody is an accomplished visual storyteller who believes in the power of art and storytelling to solve

problems and make positive change to the world.

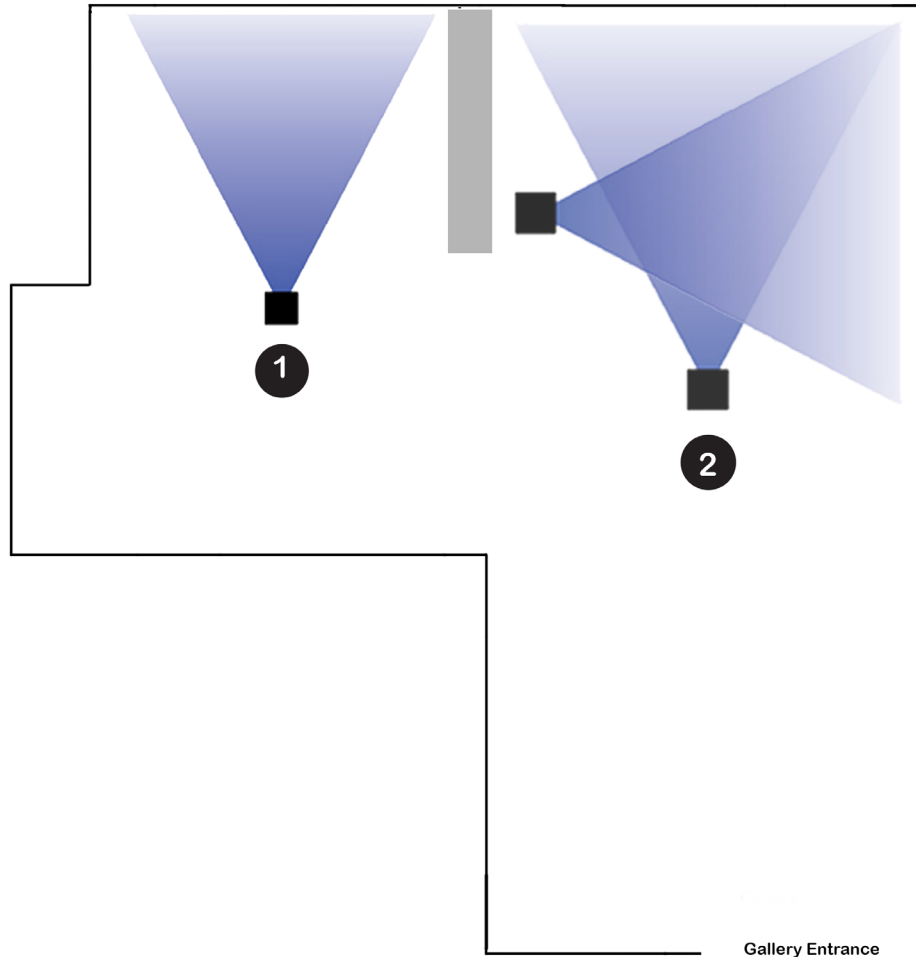
<https://www.melodytszwaili.com>

Benjamin CAREY is a Sydney-based composer, improviser and educator. He makes electronic music using the modular synthesiser, develops interactive music software and creates audio-visual works. Ben's research and practice is concerned with musical interactivity, generativity and the delicate dance between human and machine agencies in composition and performance. Ben has released several albums, including *Hypertelic* (2021) and *ANTIMATTER* (2019), and has collaborated with a variety of artists including JACK Quartet, Sydney Chamber Opera, ELISION ensemble and others. His work has been performed internationally at the Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music (UK), IRCAM Live @ La Gaité Lyrique (France) and elsewhere. Ben is a Lecturer in Composition and Music Technology at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney. In recognition of his research, Ben was recently awarded the University's SOAR Prize for 2022/23.

<https://bencarey.net/bio>

Luke HESPANHOL is a media artist, interaction designer, researcher and producer. He is a lecturer in Design at The University of Sydney, where he investigates the potential of digital media and technologies to create engaging experiences leading to reflection on the relationship between individuals and the immediate environment around them. He has explored these possibilities of public expression through the development of media installations for academic research and teaching, art galleries and public art festivals, including multiple editions of Vivid Sydney. He has also helped to drive the discourse on media art in Australia and overseas through public speaking and organisation of workshops, panels, and participatory exhibitions bridging the gap between fellow media artists, students and the industry.

<https://www.nanoluke.com/>



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Pandemic Vibrations, 2022, single animation excerpts.

Director: Diana Chester

Animator: Melody Li

Musicians: Julian Belbachir, Sonya Holowell, Benjamin Carey, and Diana Chester

Funded by The University of Sydney Environment Institute and the City of Sydney

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Permanent Hypnagogia, 2022, video animation, 4 minutes 11 seconds.

With sound piece *Parsing the Pandemic*.

Visualisations: Luke Hespanhol

Sonification: Diana Chester & Benjamin Carey

Funded by the University of Sydney Nano Institute