

OUR SHARED NIGHT SKY
Proposal, Roma Yagnik

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Initial thoughts and ideas in response to the brief:

As someone who often gains comfort and perspective from being in places where I can feel like a small part of something vast – be aware of curvature of the earth, feel the elements, see the stars - I was excited and intrigued by this brief. I thought about the notion that we are all stardust and felt like I could bring something to this project. Having specifically stayed in Kielder for the dark skies experience which I found beautiful and inspiring, the idea of potentially getting to work with Kielder Observatory is also fascinating to me.

As a film composer I love to respond to stimuli when composing – interweaving found sound/ recordings and also responding to visuals/ images. Gaining insight and perspective from the photographs which will be exhibited and the existing recordings is something I'd look forward to if I was to be successful with this proposal.

If part of this project, a key aim for my soundscape would obviously be to transport the audience, creating a sense of wonder and appreciation for both the vast and the familiar. Finding that connection. It's a challenge I'd relish and these are some ways I'd like to explore that:

- scale – expansive, celestial, ambient textures that feel like they are hanging in the air, almost like electricity (the bristling/humming/ hairs standing up on your neck kind not the beep boop kind!). I think this would provide a basis where our audience's senses are stimulated but also given space for reflection.
- Layering - use of sound from the natural world which blend with the more celestial textures – examples of this could be air moving around us (breeze/ wind), the sound of waves, shimmering out into more abstract sonic textures. Moments of darkness/ space and bursts of light.
- Careful use of rhythm – creating a “pause” for our audience, almost like we're stopping time would call for sparing use of rhythm, perhaps ensuring that where rhythm does rise out of our “hanging in the air” texture and falls away again it feels organic. Our (human) sounds might be a great way to do this – voice, breath, heartbeats/ pulse, footsteps. The patterns of stars appearing mentioned in the brief is also something that would be exciting to explore.

- Sunderland's longstanding relationship with glass strikes me as something that could be really beautiful to include here - particularly as a potential way of representing the patterns of stars appearing but also in potentially giving part of the soundscape an icy, clear feeling. I have access to some recorded glass sounds and also a glass harmonica and would be keen to experiment with and expand on that. I'd also be really interested in seeing how it might feel to manipulate a recording of music composed by William Herschel to create a layer which could be woven into the fabric of the soundscape in a new form.
- My budget includes a recording fee for a vocalist as it feels like incorporating voice (not singing lyrics but providing a human texture) might be a beautiful thing to do. One of the most connecting things for humans is singing together so it may be that, if I were to get the opportunity to work on this, the use of choral samples and my voice alongside another could be an interesting way to go too (without breaking the budget!).

How I would consider the Audience experience:

- As mentioned above, creating beautiful, layered, ambient textures which can feel like they are hanging in the air around audiences, enveloping them and constantly, sometimes imperceptibly shifting and evolving feels like a good basis for giving them a pause button/ space to reflect, allowing them to move through the space at their own chosen pace.
- I would like to delve into psychoacoustics in the r and d stage – looking at how different frequencies make us feel and utilising that.
- Beauty – Creating something of melodic and harmonic beauty for audiences is always something I'm keen to have near the top of my priority list.
- When working with the other elements of the exhibition and getting to know the space and how the audience may behave there, I would look at structuring this soundscape in a way that supports the best audience experience. More about this in “presentation”
- Ensuring that the audio experience works well with the visual side of the exhibition would also be a priority and is something that factors into all of my work.
- Placement of sound is something I would like to play with – your description of the soundscape being “like the weather”, surrounding and enveloping our audience, is also very intriguing and a brilliant stimulus for creating this piece. The idea of the sound traversing around us like the wind, washing over us like the rain has got me thinking about how important the location and behaviour of the sound is and how exciting it could be to play with that (please also see “Presentation”).

Presentation

- Provided the size of the area the audience will be in allows for it, using silent disco headsets would seem like a way to allow audiences freedom to move and also give us the opportunity to use different channels and therefore have some flexibility on presentation, offering either different sections (eg RED if you're in zone 1, BLUE for zone 2) or options (eg RED for the most intense experience or BLUE for something more in the background). Having worked in this way before, I'm aware that they tend to have a fairly good bass response (for headphones which are sometimes tinny!) and so they would also be a good choice for allowing us to utilise low frequencies which I feel is important for this. They also allow independent control of volume which is important. They would require regular charging so that would have to be factored in.
- Structure – This might be a cohesive, single soundscape of, say, a 30 min duration creating a satisfying journey for audiences wherever they join it or it could be that different soundscapes for different points in the exhibition/ or different options for audiences to choose from might be more appropriate in which case I would welcome that. I think it would be important to see how the project takes shape, how much recorded material we want to include and whether that material lends itself to sections or a whole when making that decision.
- Placement of sound – because headphones are so near to our eardrums, they allow sound to be placed precisely as the listener experiences it, enabling not only for a rich and broad stereo image and panning (moving sound left to right and vice versa) but also moving it around an audience. This is referred to as Binaural sound and it is something I have had the chance to explore a little in a theatre project years ago. I'd love to apply it here, in a subtle way that allows the audience to feel they are in a sonic world with a lot of depth which is really enveloping them. It's important to note that as people may be walking around in headphones, care would be taken not to create something disorientating so I would of course bear that in mind. Examples of binaural sound tend to be quite extreme however it can be used subtly to gently move sounds around, towards or away from us.
- Having created numerous soundscapes which include voice recordings i(all in different ways with different outcomes in terms of how the soundscape feels), incorporating readings of the creative writing element of this exhibition is something which I know will bring together the exhibition really effectively.

To summarise:

I would love to work with you and the other artists to create a soundscape and exhibition that will provide audiences with an experience where they can be transported and feel opened up to a shared experience which is all at once familiar and expansive. I want to build a sonic space which will remind audiences of the beauty of our region and our world, calling to mind not only their associations with space itself but the space they hold and what it means to be human. If successful I would investigate creative ways to immerse listeners in shifting and evolving sound, using the placement and movement of layered sonic textures, from familiar to ethereal, from stillness to swells of melodic and harmonic beauty.

Budget

Research and development (3 days)	£750
Creation (10 days)	£2500
Session musician/ vocalist recording	£500
Travel	£250
meetings and check ins (2 days)	£500
materials/ software	£250
Contingency (5%)	£250

Total £5000

Timeline

w/c 5th Jan meeting and **briefing and R and D** days. Clarification of how recordings may be part of the soundscape (and listening through those) and how photography and soundscape can complement one another. Decision on whether the soundscape should comprise of sections or be one, longer piece.

w/c 12th19th and 26th Jan **Creation (first draft)** including any opportunities to engage with the imagery and words created already as part of this exhibition and collaborate with the artists who have worked on those if that is appropriate and possible.

2nd Feb **Sharing of first draft.**

w/c 16th February **revisions** (in response to feedback) and further development. Continued collaboration. Recording of any instrumentalists/ vocalists.

23rd February **Sharing of second draft**

W/c 2nd and 9th March Final round of revisions (in response to feedback)

16th March – **Sharing of final file/s**

I'd also like to be present for installation and headphone testing to ensure that everything is as it should be.