

Learning Resource for Sunderland Exhibitions



AV Festival forms part of North East England's world-class festivals and events programme



The exhibition(s) that you are going to see and experience are part of the AV Festival 2008. AV means audio visual, audio can be heard, visual can be seen. AV Festival is an international festival of electronic arts featuring visual art, music and moving image. A biennial event, (this means that it happens every two years) the festival takes place in Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland and Middlesbrough in the North East of England between 28th February and 8th March 2008 and has the theme of Broadcast.

We have just entered the second century of broadcasting and are in a time of great change. The change to digital will create endless possibilities for communities and people to be part of broadcasting and it is already an area that artists are exploring in their work.

The internet has become another area for broadcasting and sharing sound, film, video and photography, through the many online sites. This is moving at a very fast pace. We now receive broadcasts on the move, podcasts, tv and radio on our phones, PDA's and hand held computers. For AV Festival 08, artists, filmmakers and musicians have created works which illuminate all aspects of broadcasting. You will become part of this as the audience for the work. Enjoy AV Festival 2008!



You are visiting the Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens



Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens combines a museum, art gallery, exhibition space and Winter Gardens to create a stunning visitor attraction in the heart of the city centre.

The beautiful Winter Gardens stimulate the senses with over 2,000 flowers and plants brought together in a spectacular showcase of the world's natural beauty.

You can see them. You can smell them. You can enjoy the beauty of the shapes, the colours, the textures.

The installation that you will experience is not in a separate art gallery, it is in the Winter Gardens itself as an installation and is part of the AVFestival 2008.

The name of the exhibition you are going to see is “Whispering in the Leaves”

The artist is **Chris Watson**

This is a **contemporary art exhibition** and is called an **installation**

Contemporary art means that the art belongs to the present day. A **contemporary artist** is an artist who is alive today and who makes works of art to be exhibited in galleries and public spaces at the moment.

In **installation art**, the artist creates a single piece of work in a given or chosen space. They have to think about where the art is placed, how you will see it, hear it and experience it. It is a very special kind of art making. Sometimes the audience have to participate in the work. Sometimes they can just sit and experience the art.

In this installation your experiences will involve a lot of listening.

You will look as well, you maybe even start to imagine that the sounds are really coming from within the plants and the flowers.

But although you know that they plants and flowers are always here, the sounds will only be here for the length of time that the installation.

Who is Chris Watson?



Chris is a wildlife sound recordist. He started his music career as part of a band. Chris then moved into television as well as continuing to make music and work with other musicians. He has released a number of CD's by himself and with other artists. Chris has worked as a sound recordist for the BBC, including "The Life Of Birds" which won a BAFTA award for best factual sound. He has also worked on the "Life of Mammals" and the "Big Cat Diary". Many of Chris' sound recordings can also be heard on radio. Bill Oddie is a big fan of Chris's work.

Chris has his own website www.chriswatson.net

You can get information on Chris' music recordings on CD by visiting www.amazon.co.uk

“Whispering in the Leaves”

This installation work uses the background of the Winter Gardens and its great collection of over 2,000 flowers and plants. The sound will become part of the Winter Gardens for a while. Chris has chosen recordings that he made in Central and South America. These were made in the tropical rainforests. They are recordings of the dawn (as the sun rises) and the dusk (as the sun sets) chorus that are heard in the rainforests. This is the time of day , in the rainforest, when the sounds of the birds and the animals are at their loudest. Here in the U.K. you can hear the dawn and dusk chorus of the birds in your garden or the park. Of course, in the rain forest, the birds and the animals outnumber any human beings.

The sound installation will be in the Winter Gardens for everyone to enjoy while the AV Festival is on but Chris is also going to create a “live” performance in the space. Chris will then perform a sound mix where he takes a 3 or 4 hour time period and compresses it into 20 minutes. It will include a tropical thunderstorm and the sounds of the insects at night. The performance will be at night so that the audience will really feel as if they are there, in the rainforest.

How this installation will work

During the day, at hourly intervals, the sounds will be transmitted. Chris has thought about how to integrate the sounds with the surroundings of the plants and flowers. The rainforest is a very crowded place and it is difficult to see much because of the density of it all. That's why this is a good location.

Each time the sounds are played, they will be heard for about 15 to 20 minutes. If Chris had created the sound to be played all day, then we would not hear it as a "special" sound, it would become a background. He has compressed the chorus, which usually lasts 90 minutes to two hours, into condensed shorter bursts. It is his own interpretation of the sounds heard in the rainforest.

A dawn or dusk chorus is a "burst" of sound. It starts with one or two noises and then gets louder and bigger as a sound. Visitors to the Winter Gardens will hear this burst of sound. They will also have the experience of hearing it slowly starting and slowly fading away. This will be like the real life experience of being in the rainforest.

So, here in , on a winter's day, in chilly Sunderland, visitors will hear the calls, the voices of hundreds of species, the hissing of tree frogs and cicadas, the howls and the shrieks of black howler and spider monkeys, and the music of hundreds of different bird songs.

What Chris wants to do with this installation is to use sound, that he records in a far away place, to take us to that far away place.

It is unlikely that any of us will travel to the rainforest so this gives us the chance to experience the sounds that happen there.

Because The Winter Gardens has a collection of plants which are unusual and exotic, it is the perfect place to have this installation. Chris thinks the environment of the Winter Gardens is a great location for this because of its collection of exotic plants and the way that people can walk around it. He wants them to wander round as they would usually do so that the sound and the experience of being here are integrated together.

Sound is powerful. It makes us sit up and take notice. Sometimes noise and sound frightens us if we don't know what it is, but sound can also make us feel comfortable and happy. This installation will transport you to another time and place, if you let it. It will be interesting to sit, look and hear.

It will also be interesting to close your eyes and see what pictures are created inside your head, from the imagination, as you listen to the recordings.

Chris has made the sound part of the environment, it is not obvious where the sound is coming from. The speakers carrying the sound will be discreet. This is why the installation is called “Whispering in the Leaves”. The rainforest is a very crowded place and it is difficult to see much because of the density of it all. So, it is not important that we can see where the sounds are coming from in the Winter Gardens.

In the morning sessions we hear the sounds of sunset in the rainforest. In the rainforest, dawn is very quick and the birds start their singing and then develop this into an explosion of sound. They pack in as much song as they can because, as the sun rises, temperatures can also rise rapidly from 18 degrees to 38 degrees. In the afternoon sessions we hear the sounds that are there in the rainforest as the sun sets in the evening and the heat of the day dies down.

Chris wants the listener to be stimulated by the sound. They will use their imaginations to create images that match the sounds.

He hopes that the Winter Gardens will act as a theatre to the sounds. There is fantastic variety in the sounds you hear, the variety of bird species is huge and some species remain undiscovered and unnamed by scientists to this day. Chris wants the listeners to be part of what is he calls an “alien empire”, he wants us to feel as if we are visiting, for a short time, another planet.

Group activity: Pair work

Choose a partner.

Do the following activities in a pair. It is a **LISTENING** Task. You need to **LISTEN** to the whole of the sound installation. If you visit in the **morning** it will be the **dawn chorus** as the sun rises. If you visit in the **afternoon** it will be the **dusk chorus** as the sun sets Can you hear any of these (below) distinct sounds ?

My partner is

Birds : Describe the sounds

Insects : Describe the sounds

Frogs : Describe the sounds

Monkeys : Describe the sounds

There are 3 types of monkeys to be heard, the **black howler monkey** is the **LOUDEST** monkey in South America. They like to communicate and their sound is described as roaring. They can be heard 5 km away ! The **white faced monkey** is a smaller and very fast, mobile monkey. The **spider monkeys**, so called because of their long limbs, are also very fast moving

creatures. They are very intelligent and very social. Remember they have to keep moving around on the floor of the forest because it is populated by predators such as boa constrictors. They are safer when they

Group activity: Pair work

Choose a partner.

Do the following activities in a pair, you will need to swop roles when the activities have been done once. Be patient and give your partner **TIME** to come up with their responses.

Ask your partner to sit within the installation at a place that **they** decide on.

Ask them to get comfortable and ask them to talk when they are ready.

Ask for **TEN** key words to describe what they **SEE**. Write them here. This is **VISUAL** Ask them to close their eyes and **LISTEN** for some time. Now ask for **TEN** key words which describe what they **HEAR**. Write them here. This is **AUDIO**

My partner is

Individual Activity

Find some space to sit by yourself, not too close to anyone else.
Sit, relax, look, listen.

Name

Is it different when you hear the sound recordings with your eyes closed?
YES/NO If you answer **YES**, can you explain why it is different?

What sound stands out the most for you?

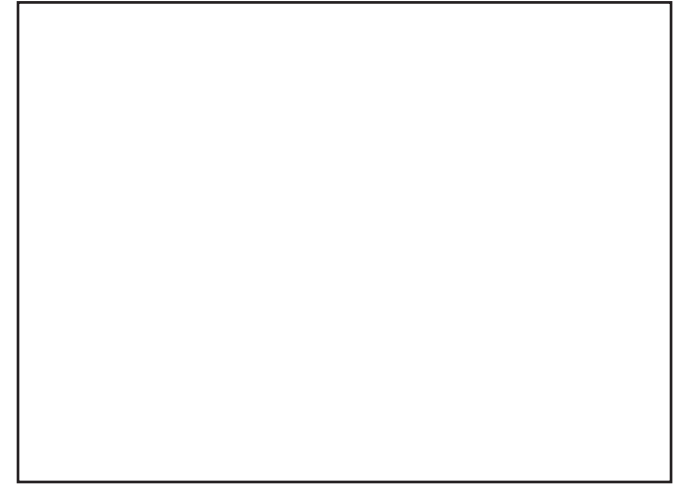
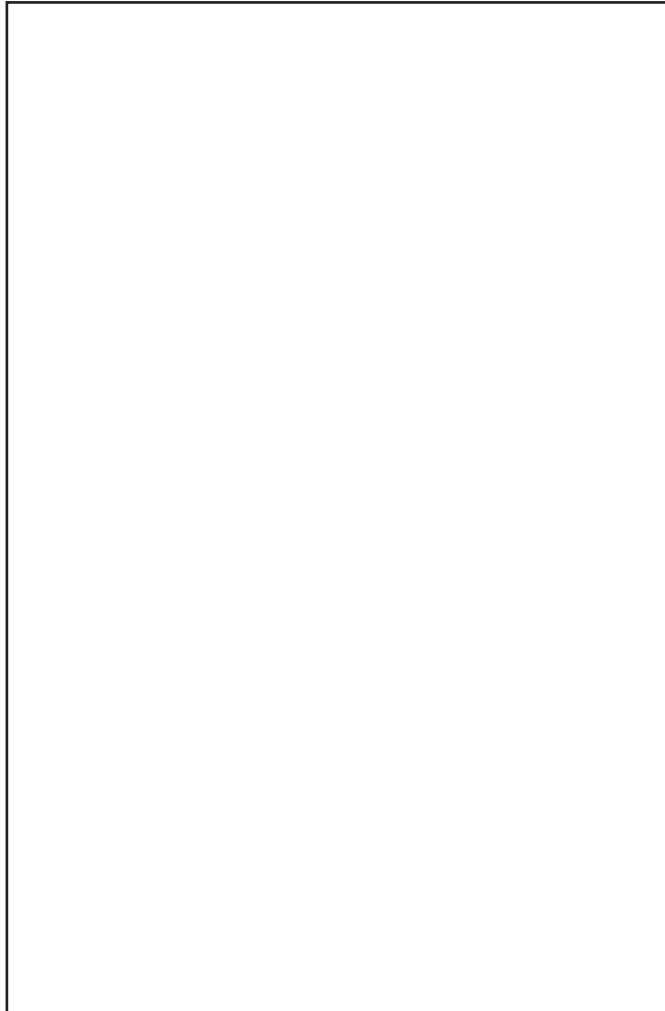
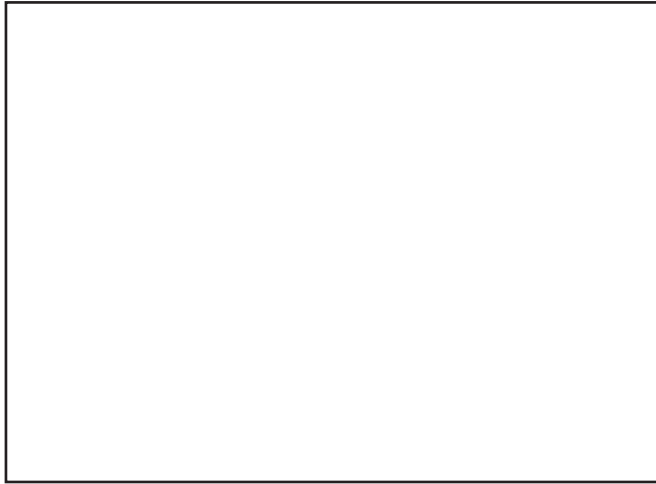
Are there any sounds you don't like? If you answer **YES**,
can you describe them and why you don't like them?

Have you got a favourite sound in this mix of sounds?
If you answer **YES**, can you describe it and explain why you like it?

Individual Activity

Use the boxes on this page to sketch parts of the plants and the flowers and the area that you are sitting in. Remember that a drawing is a record of something, it can be quick, it can just be lines, or you can spend longer on it. That's up to you. You can write words inside the drawings if you like. The words can be about the way the place and the sounds are making you feel.

Name



AV Festival 08 Broadcast



Reg Vardy Logo



north east
england

