

Ray Lee:



About the work:

Congregation is an outdoor, immersive, sound art theatre project that builds on the success of Ray Lee's outdoor work such as *Chorus* (see <http://vimeo.com/99467393>) and *Ring Out* (see <https://vimeo.com/oxfordcontemporarymusic/ringout>)

In *Congregation* the audience (of up to 80 sphere carriers) are invited in small groups to discrete locations in a city where they are given a silver sphere. They are instructed that the sphere will guide them to a location by emitting sounds, one sound for the correct direction and another for the wrong direction. Simultaneously other audience members are being met at different locations and also being given similar spheres. All of the locations are on the circumference of an area the centre of which is the location to which all of the participants are being led. As the audience members walk off holding their sonic spheres, they will turn a corner to find more people also carrying spheres until the sphere carrying participants have become a 'congregation' moving inexorably towards a central location.

For the public, the sight of one person after another carrying a distinctive silver sonic sphere will create the sense of being in a performance that is taking place all around them. As the spheres congregate the sounds begin to change and the mass of spheres will create a humming electronic web of sound that will attract and engage thousands of passers-by in a strange processional science fiction ceremony. The mass of 'singing' spheres will be used generate an electronic musical composition at the final location with the participants being the orchestral players holding the choir of sonic spheres.

Congregation has been developed as a result of an initial residency at the National Theatre Studio and R&D support from The Kitchen (Appetite, Stoke on Trent) and a Without Walls Blueprint R&D award. Without Walls. It has been commissioned by Norwich and Norfolk Festival and Out There Festival Great Yarmouth with financial support from Without Walls, OCM, Oxford Brookes University and 101 Outdoor Arts, Newbury.

Possible brochure copy:

"Let a sonic sphere take you on a journey to a secret location, guiding you by sound alone. Seemingly possessed of its own mind it guides you through familiar and unfamiliar terrain. Can you keep the sphere 'happy' by going in the right direction? In return the sphere will lead you on a sonic voyage to the mysterious final destination where you will encounter a meeting of the spheres, a chiming, pulsing web of electronic sound."

Sites:

Congregation can be located in an urban or a rural location. The work involves the participants undertaking a short journey on foot guided by a sphere that they carry with them. Some testing of the area is necessary to determine the ideal routes for the sphere carriers. See 'How Congregation works' below.

Sphere distribution:

The audience book tickets which direct them to a specific location where they will collect their sphere. At each location the participants will be met by a member of the team, a 'Sphere Guardian', who will brief the audience before giving them a sphere.

Performances:

Each presentation of *Congregation* lasts around 35-45 mins depending on the length of the journey. The work can be presented up to four times a day to a direct participatory audience of up to 70-80 per show. The work is best presented in day light conditions. The performance can take place in light rain conditions.

Technical support:

No specialist technical support is required.

Freight:

In the UK *Congregation* can tour in a small van. For international presentation the work will ship in two flight cases total weight 220KGs. Each flight case dimension is: 1100mmx800x750mm.

Contact:

Congregation is a Ray Lee production in partnership with Simon Chatterton projects.

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Photo: Norwich and Norfolk Festival

Requirements:**Ray Lee, the artist will:**

1. Choose a final destination point for the spheres in consultation and negotiation with the festival organiser.
2. Determine five (t.b.c) appropriate starting points for the audience to be directed to in consultation and negotiation with the festival organiser.

The festival will:

3. Discuss and agree with the artist the number of and timings of performances during the run.
4. Discuss and agree with the artist suitable means of ticketing and managing audience distribution to the starting points.
5. Provide at least three (depending on the size of the touring team) personnel who will be trained by the Ray Lee Company to be 'Sphere Guardians', managing the operation of the spheres and briefing the audience on their use. Sphere Guardians need to be available for a minimum of 90 minutes the day before the first performance to be trained by the Company and to be available for all performances. They need to be physically capable of pulling a wheeled case of approx. 10kgs to and from the starting locations. In a day this could amount to several kilometres of walking.
6. Provide a steward for each of the starting locations plus one person to be at the final location. Stewards will be available from 30 mins prior to each performance for the duration of each performance.
7. Provide a secure, ground floor space close to the final destination in order to charge and maintain the spheres for the duration of the run. The space should have mains electricity. 1 x 13amp supply is sufficient. The electricity should remain on overnight. The space will also be used for keeping costumes and preparation prior to the performances.
8. Provide single rooms for each of the travelling party for the duration. The company tours with three or four members depending on circumstances and by prior agreement with the festival.
9. At the final destination, the performance utilises five portable stands to house the spheres and a small portable battery powered loudspeaker. These need to be supervised by a festival steward in between performances.

How Congregation works:

We programme the final coordinates into the spheres and they direct the audience to that point by the most direct route. They do this by making a series of sounds, a 'happy' sound if you're going the right way, a 'sad' sound if you start to go off course, an 'agitated' sound if you go more than 90 degrees off course, and an 'annoyed' sound if you go completely the wrong way. The audience are briefed at the start, but have to interpret the sphere's sounds for themselves and learn to use them to navigate.

We decide the final destination and set in the region of five starting locations which will be at points around 600-800m away from this end location, in effect drawing a circle with a 600-800m radius around it and then looking for suitable places that the audience can gather to receive their briefing and be given a sphere. This is negotiable, the system has no limitation in terms of distance. It is a balance between making an interesting journey for a varied and mixed audience without making it too long or too short. Because the sphere wants to take people 'as the crow flies' there will be occasions where the sphere carrier has to make decisions about which way to go so not all of the audience starting from a particular starting point will end up getting to the final location by the same route, however, ideally the audience gradually start to come across other sphere carriers coming from different directions.



Photo: Ray Lee

An ideal end location is somewhere not too public because if the shows runs multiple times over a few days then this end location can become too obvious. It is also good if the end location has multiple entry points especially from roughly the directions the audience are likely to be coming from. We try to avoid any start points that give too straight a route to the final location as it becomes too easy for the audience.

We brief the audience before we allow them to take a sphere. The script is designed to anthropomorphise the sphere, to encourage the audience to take care of it and also to look out for their own safety. The three team members from Congregation will provide

training for three locally based helpers. We call these the 'guardians of the spheres' and they wear a simple costume, a grey coat. The spheres are transported in wooden cases on trolleys. The Guardians wheel these to the start points before the audience arrive and they activate the spheres so they are ready for the audience. The precise start time is coordinated via a whatsapp group on mobile phones we provide. The aim is to get the majority of the audience arriving at the end location at approximately the same time. The audience are also given directions for how to return a sphere should they need to stop their journey for any reason.



Photo: Norwich and Norfolk Festival

The end location is a circle of 50m across (which we can adjust if necessary) This final zone is divided up into 24 sub sections each of which trigger a different sound, so as the audience begin to congregate they are encouraged to walk around and experience all the different sounds at the final zone.

We have portable stands to receive the spheres and a small battery powered bass speaker (which plays a bass part to accompany the congregating spheres). These are kept out of sight until a critical mass of audience has congregated and then the stands are produced and we begin to collect back the spheres from the audience at the same time triggering a short final musical sequence where all the spheres play the same sounds. The sound gradually fades out and the work ends. We pack everything away and remove the stands and speaker.



Photo: Norwich and Norfolk Festival

About Ray Lee

Ray Lee is a multi-award-winning composer and artist. He won a BASCA Composer of the Year award for the highly inventive music theatre project *The Ethometric Museum*.

His monumental outdoor work *Chorus* has been touring nationally and internationally since 2013 with appearances as part of major outdoor programmes organised by Lieux Publics in Marseilles, the National Theatre, WOMAD, the Southbank, Hong Kong International Arts Festival, Georgetown Festival in Penang, ZAT Montpellier, Warsaw Contemporary Music Festival, Connected Cities in Seoul, South Korea, a Circulate tour of four London venues and at festivals in Melbourne and Romania to name a few. *Chorus* was shortlisted for the 2014 BASCA Composer of the Year award.

His world-wide hit *Siren* has been performed over three hundred and fifty times in eighteen countries across three continents and continues to tour internationally. *Force Field* was awarded an honorary mention in the 2008 Prix Ars Electronica for Digital Music. His recent work *Ring Out* was co-commissioned by OCM receiving a PRS New Music Biennial award. *Ring Out* has been presented at Hull City of Culture and London Southbank as well as Newbury and Oxford. A recording of the work was broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

He is a Professor of Sound Art at Oxford Brookes University and an associate artist of OCM (Oxford Contemporary Music).

"As an artist I explore my fascinations with the world. I am fascinated by themes that include the emergence of the scientific method, the development of technology, and the way science represents our view of the universe. I have a childlike fascination with radio waves, magnetism and invisible forces. There is a magic in the act of turning on a radio and receiving signals through the Ether or in holding two magnets in your hands and feeling this invisible force pulling your hands together or pushing them apart.

Physicality is essential to the work and it is inherent in both the structures I build and the sound that is created. I build machines that make sound. The fact that they often move means that the sound itself is being modulated by the movement. In my approach, it is not possible for me to have the sound in any way separate to the physical structure, object, or machine that produces the sound.

Live performance is an important part of what I do. I am intrigued by the relationship that emerges between the performers as operators and workers of the machine and the machines themselves. As humans, we relate to other humans more than we relate to machines, but we also want to breathe life into inanimate objects. Combining kinetic machines with performers who work with, look after, monitor, control these devices enables the audience to start creating their own narrative about the work.

I tend not to have a proscribed meaning for the work. It's a physical experience created by the movement of sound, machines and light. I hope that through this the audience can find a space for wonderment, for contemplation, a space that takes you outside of your everyday existence even momentarily; a space where we don't have to understand, or categorise or explain, but where we can let our extraordinary minds free for a few moments and drift among imaginary stars and unknown worlds of experience and perception.

Making work for outdoor contexts gives me the possibility of reaching many more people and something interesting happens when you take an audience outside of traditional art venues. We stop being so governed by the protocols of these spaces, from the hushed silence of the concert hall to the studious reverence of the art gallery and we can see the artwork as being part of our actual lives not as something removed from it." *Ray Lee*



Photo: XimenaySergio

Congregation briefing notes (for the Sphere Guardians)

[Make sure everyone is gathered round and that everyone can hear you. Speak loudly. Louder than you think you should. It is vital everyone hears the instructions]

Welcome to Congregation. Congregation takes place around the streets of *[insert location]* and the journey should last about 15 minutes.

[PERSONALITY TRAITS]

[Pause. Take a sphere and show it to the group.]

Each sphere wants to go to a specific location, and it needs you to take it there. If you go the right way the it will sound 'happy'. If you go off course it will sound sad and the further away you get the more distressed it will be. The closer it gets to the final destination the happier it will be.

[Make arm movements like an air steward.]

The sphere wants to go as the crow flies. It doesn't know that there are buildings, rivers, canals, walls or hedges in the way, it can't see them. So you may have to put up with the sphere sounding a bit sad while you have to go around a building for example. It likes to be out in the open, it gets a bit claustrophobic and will be very unhappy if you go inside. It doesn't like to keep still, it gets impatient.

[WAKE UP]

In a moment we will wake up the spheres. I'll tell you when the spheres are ready to go. Start by walking around and listening to the sphere. Does it sound happy? Keep the sphere happy. If you need any help ask one of us.

[INSTRUCTIONS / WARNINGS]

Please look after your sphere and treat it very gently. Hold it this way up and always use the strap when carrying it and do not let it fall or get damaged.

Please take special care when crossing roads and be especially vigilant for any cars or vehicles. If you have young children with you, please make sure that they remain with you at all times. Children under the age of 10 should not hold the spheres. If for any reason you need to stop your journey please return your sphere to one of the Sphere Guardians or phone the number on this card. *[give out cards]*

[FAREWELL]

Take great care of yourself and your sphere.

[Give spheres.]

Safe journeys