King Creativity Grant Proposal

AIDS Through Music

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AIDS Through Music (ATM) will be a performance of music composed live according to rules analogous to the hyper-mutagenesis and proliferation of HIV within the host immune system. The purpose of the performance is to inform the Southwestern community of the means by which HIV spreads throughout the body and the difficulties regarding treatment in a manner that is accessible to a non-scientifically minded audience. ATM will utilize a musical medium to elucidate the process by which HIV intentionally mutates within a CD4 (Helper) T-cell by faulty genetic copying mechanisms and actively evolves to ‘out-compete’ the host immune system. Information regarding how the viral capsid bonds to the CD4 T-cell, viral RNA is transcribed by the intentionally faulty reverse transcriptase into viral DNA, how this viral DNA is inserted into the host DNA, and under what conditions the viral DNA initiates replication was conveyed to the musicians involved.

Winston Myers, Rachel DeLong, and Michelle Moses taught the biological process to Stinson Seuser and Phillip Wozny, who collaborated to design a performance which metaphorically conveys the biological process in an accessible manner. The result functions as follows: A healthy T-cell is represented by a circle of musicians (Group A) seated in front of computer screens continually updating a sheet of music. The musicians play a simple melody which is transcribed by another group of musicians (Group B). The transcription then appears on the Group A’s screens. All errors in playing by Group A will be accurately transcribed by Group B and Group A will play the errors inserted by Group B. The initial melody will be simple enough to be easily played and easily
transcribed. Then, a viral musician enters Group A and begins to play a new song while Group A continues to try to play the original melody. Errors will emerge by Group B’s transcription of two songs simultaneously. Said errors will be played by Group A thus transforming the original song into a new viral song. Any portion of the new viral song may be used by a new viral musician to enter a new healthy T-cell group of musicians. The process may be performed with as few as 7 musicians. However, to demonstrate the spread of HIV from one cell to another more may be required. Stinson Seuser, president of the New Music Collective, will organize a group of interested and capable musicians to execute the project.

The performance will take place in conjunction with the Southwestern chapter of FACE AIDS on December 1st, National Day Without Art, which since 1989 has been a day of action and mourning in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Until December 1st, weekly meetings will be held to workshop the necessary sight-reading and transcription components. The group has already been meeting weekly to design the process and will continue to refine it as the workshops progress. A video of the performance will be displayed at the symposium.

Creativity Statement

AIDS Through Music exemplifies the promise of the liberal arts through the integration of disciplines. The group responsible for its design has a variety of Biology, Psychology, History, and Music majors. As such, each meeting consists of peer to peer education on a variety of subjects ranging from the central dogma of cell biology to optimal microphone placement. This project could not occur within the classroom
because the lack of a professor is an integral part to our creative philosophy: the good ideas come out of relaxed conditions. The presence of a professor tends to focus attention to the final grade often at the cost of the creative process. Yes, ATM is an end result, yet it was merely the byproduct of lively discussion with no particular goal. The result is a rare breed of art that is rather divorced from the artistic and academic tradition. Each step in the design of ATM is informed by thorough analysis of the subject at hand. Hence, the performance lacks the ego of authorship because the true author is biology that we are humble interpreters of.

Documentation

The process of workshopping the performance will be documented via wordpress blog. Posts will be made once a week detailing the progress of the project and recordings from workshops. The December 1\textsuperscript{st} performance will be recorded on HD video which will be mixed with the high quality audio recording to produce a DVD of the performance to be presented at the symposium.

Budget Total: $638

3x SM57 Microphones $99 each, total: $297
1x Pre-Sonus HP-60 Headphone Amplifier $299
3x Rode X/Y stereo microphone $14 (weekend rental from Rock and Roll Rentals), total: $42
Assessment

The success of the ATM performance will be determined by the following factors:

Firstly, there must be a HD DVD recording mixed with the audio from the recording of the performance to be available to those who donate to the December 1st art auction.

Second, the process of the performance must run smoothly without technological errors between computers. Finally and most importantly, the audience must gain some insight into the nature of HIV proliferation.