

Study Guide for Lelavision's *Physical Music*

By Sarah Rose Graber

Every spring, the Chicago Humanities Festival offers **Stages, Sights, and Sounds**, a mix of the best theater, music, dance, puppetry, and visual art the world has to offer. 2010 features three international companies making their Chicago debuts: Scotland's Visible Fictions, Israel's The Galilee Multicultural Theatre, and France's Vélo Théâtre. Two Chicagoans, Frank Maugeri of Redmoon Theater and beatboxer/vocal percussionist Yuri Lane, treat us to brand-new work. At the audience's request, we also welcome back Leah Mann and Ela Lamblin, the dynamic duo behind Lelavision, whose stunning physicality and musical sculptures made it the runaway hit of the 2008 festival.

We have prepared study guides for each of the 2010 performances. These materials will help teachers ready their classes for the 2010 **Stages, Sights, and Sounds** and provide activities and ideas to explore with students long after the Festival is over.

ABOUT THE CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

The Chicago Humanities Festival (CHF) creates year-round opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and economic circumstances to explore, enjoy, and support the arts and humanities. We accomplish this by presenting programs throughout the year, culminating in two annual Festivals of the Humanities, one in the spring specifically for children and families and one in the fall for the general public. The CHF's mission of providing broad access to the humanities – at a low ticket price – depends in part on the generosity of its most committed and enthusiastic supporters.

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Lesson Plan:

Physical Music Lelavision

Seattle-based **Lelavision** is a partnership between an instrument maker and a dancer. This husband-and-wife team, Ela Lamblin and Leah Mann, creates performances that combine art, music, and dance. In 2010 they invite an Emory University scientist to join them in the production of *Physical Music*, which showcases Lelavision's stunning and singular musical sculptures and its astonishing physicality.

BIOGRAPHY

Lelavision co-founders Ela Lamblin and Leah Mann began their collaborative efforts in 1992 in Atlanta, GA, using sculpture, music, and movement to develop themes based on myth, nature, and spirit. In 1996, they founded Lelavision in the Seattle, Washington area and, to this day, live and create their art at their home on Vashon Island in the Puget Sound. Lelavision has been presented by entities such as The New Genre Festival of Tulsa, Boston's Dance Umbrella, Emory University, Chattanooga's Barking Legs and the National Performance Network. Abroad, the company has toured the UK, Italy, Israel, Canada, Singapore, and Bangkok with entities such as Teatro della Tosse, Singapore International Children's Festival, and AnTobar Arts Center.

The name Lela is more than a play on the names of the founders; derived from two Sanskrit terms meaning "creation" and "creative spark," with references to "play," it denotes the spirit of the performance group. The company combines modern and aerial dance, music, theater, and large interactive musical sculptures to create innovative works of awe and whimsy. Their work is about the transfer of energy, the emanations of the soul, and the common denominators of the human experience. Mann and Lamblin work with a synthesis of form, space, movement, and music in a collaboration that draws on the unique contribution of each.

STAGES SIGHTS & SOUNDS

CONTENTS

In this guide you'll find:

- Three lesson plans recommended for 4th and 5th grades.
- Each activity will take 15-20 minutes
- These activities can be used to prepare students for Lelavision's performance or in response to what they see during **Stages, Sights, and Sounds**.

ACTIVITY: PASS THE SOUND & MOTION

Purpose: Lelavision describes their work as “Physical Music.” This exercise will allow students to learn how to physicalize sounds.

Time Frame: 5-10 minutes

Lesson Plan:

- o Everyone stands in a circle
- o One person will start by creating a vocal sound and motion with their body
- o The person next to them will repeat that same sound and motion, and then the next person will repeat that same sound and motion, and on, and on until it goes completely around the circle, back to the person who started it.
- o The person who started that first sound and motion will do it one more time to finish off.
- o The next person in the circle will create a completely new sound and motion which will get passed around the circle.

Variations:

- o Create a sound and motion that starts very small and as it makes its way around the circle, it gets bigger and louder!
- o Now do the opposite where it starts very big and becomes extremely small and quiet.
- o Create a sound and motion now using the theme (i.e.: “sounds you’d hear in a video game,” “sounds associated with happiness,” etc.)

ACTIVITY: MAKING MUSIC

Purpose: The objects around us can make great musical instruments! Ela, one of the performers in Lelavision, creates non-traditional musical instruments to make the sounds in their performance pieces. This exercise will help students find potential in the everyday materials around them while allowing them to understand rhythm and focus on listening skills.

Time Frame: 15 minutes

Lesson Plan:

- o Assemble a box of found objects (i.e.: newspaper, a paper towel roll, a clicking pen, a plastic cup, etc)
- o Have the students select one of the objects
- o Ask them to explore the different sounds that can be created with this object.
 - o Focus primarily on:
 - o Percussion: anything that can be hit (either with a hand or another stick/object)
 - o Wind: anything that is blown into or requires air
- o The students will take their “instrument” and form a circle.
- o As the teacher, you will be the conductor of the orchestra in the center of the circle.
- o Select a student by pointing at him or her, who can start “playing” his or her instrument with a simple and consistent beat.
- o Bring your hand into a fist shape to signal for the student to stop his or her sound.
- o One at a time, you will point to students to add on to the beat with their instruments.
- o Make sure you are helping to keep the rhythm by clapping your hands 1, 2, 3, 4 or repeating a particular student’s rhythm together until he or she is comfortable.
- o Raise your arms up to raise the volume.
- o Bring your arms down to lower the volume.

DIGGING DEEPER

Writing Exercise: Imagine that you are a musical instrument inventor. Write about your latest musical creation. What is the instrument called? What it is it made out of? How did you come up with the idea to create it?

ACTIVITY: PARTNER POSES

Purpose: Assembling the movements for each piece created by Lelavision takes teamwork and balance. In this exercise, students will learn about embracing each other's ideas, thinking quickly on their feet, and responding physically to shapes with balance.

Time Frame: 15 minutes

Lesson Plan:

- o Have each student find a partner
- o The partners will hold their right hands together
- o One partner moves into a physically active position and freezes
- o The next partner responds to that partner's physical pose with his or her own position
- o Continue with hands held to create new shapes and poses.
- o Variations
- o When mastered, repeat exercise without holding hands. Play with spatial relations and keep eye contact.

WORKS CITED

Lelavision Website

(includes biographies for Ela Lamblin and Leah Mann)
<http://lelavision.com/>

Performance excerpts by Lelavision

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8OLH2-SCLE>

Additional ideas for making instruments out of everyday objects

http://audiolab-online.com/Making_Musical_Instruments.htm