

Collaborating with Chargeurs Museum Studio to build the future of experiential audio in heritage contexts

Project Lead: Dr Tom Parkinson, Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London

Business Partner: Chargeurs Museum Studio Ltd.

Associate: Lewis Gibson

Background

In the last decade, the international heritage and museum sectors have experienced a huge shift with a refocus on improving visitor experience and increasing engagement through audio technologies. However, a conceptual and technical barrier remain to fully achieve such audio experience in the museum context. Currently, the sound is delivered by headphones or fixed speakers to isolated individual or group visitors. What is missing is the possibility of a curated experience between these two poles that is responsive to the non-linearity of museum explorations for both individual and collective adventures.

Challenge

Chargeurs Museum Studio is facing a multi-disciplinary problem of combining technology, acoustics, storytelling, curation, attentional psychology and sound design. Therefore, diverse expertise is needed to tackle the issue by identifying how novel spatial and directional audio technologies can help initiate a shift in how sound operates in a heritage context. All of this presents a considerable technical and creative challenge. Firstly, what capabilities do the existing audio technologies have and what can be done to improve the museum visitor experience. Secondly, can different sound effects be introduced to set Chargeurs Museum Studio apart and allow to bid for more international projects.

Solution

Chargeurs Museum Studio decided to participate in a four-month Accelerated Knowledge Transfer to Innovate (AKT2I) project in collaboration with Royal Holloway, University of London. The first step of this project was to identify the steps that the business can take to improve the audio system design in a heritage context. Subsequently, the project used surveys to look at



examples of current best practices and created a database of international companies advancing audio provision. The third stage involved establishing the terms for wide-ranging future exchanges, involving more partners with specialised skills.

Lewis Gibson, a freelance sound designer who graduated from Dartington College of Arts, was appointed as the AKT associate. He has previously been involved in projects experimenting with new audio technologies in theatre and live immersive events. His responsibilities included interviewing musical professionals, conducting surveys and producing audio guides and installations.

Project academic lead Dr Tom Parkinson has twenty-years of experience working in the industry as a composer and sound designer in an interdisciplinary context. He specialises in a broad range of immersive, installation and heritage-based experiences of international significance. He has previously composed the music and designed the sound for numerous national projects across the globe, including the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre of Tunisia and the National Dance Company of Korea.

Dr Parkinson summarised:

“It has been an exciting time. There are new technologies happening in the audio sector, and a renewed focus on the potential of audio to enhance visitor experience in museums and heritage sites, both from a scholarly but also practical perspective. However, it’s difficult to know exactly what’s happening and where it’s happening, as it’s quite a dynamic field. Essentially, when we were working with the company, we have made an overview of what’s happening in the field, which practitioners are doing it, and we are looking at the potential next steps for the field.”

Impact

The project has finished the assessment which integrated specialists in both industry and academia, which greatly complement the range of skills already in place within the business. This partnership has allowed Chargeurs Museum Studio to position itself as a global leader in delivering audio-based heritage experiences. In addition, this AKT21 project has allowed the company to enhance the audio service offering, enabling to bid for significant international heritage projects with an increased chance for success.



Through the research, the AKT21 associate Lewis Gibson has expanded his heritage sector audio knowledge by producing a robust and comprehensive survey in the creative and technical field to support the project.

Dr Parkinson added:

“The research assistant has been interviewing practitioners and visiting sites around the country. Therefore, we got a much greater overview of the kinds of things that are happening and who else is doing interesting and exciting things. It’s been a relatively short project in terms of what we set out to do, but we’ve pretty much nailed them.”

For academics who are interested in KTP projects, Dr Parkinson generously shared his secret for successfully delivering the project:

“If it’s not your genuine interest, then the project wouldn’t be worth it. So, it’s worth really thinking about what the project is and what it is that you want to spend time on. I think that probably has an impact on the success of the application process and the project as well.”

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