
RESEARCH INTERESTS

William J Mackwood is a co-founder of **Out of the Box Productions**, a Toronto based multi-disciplinary, intermedial performance company. The heart of his research lies in developing meaningful stories told through a ‘performance fusion.’ His previous research project, *The Greening of Opera Erotique*: creating sustainable design on demand, used LED technology and digital media to create a lighting/projection design that uses only the newest, most efficient fixtures and sustainable theatre practice. In effect, the research project was a comparative study with a previous production that used all conventional lighting fixtures. His current project, *Bug^{zzz}*: an interdisciplinary exploration of immersive staging techniques using sustainable ‘design on demand’ theatre practice, will explore the possibility of increasing human empathetic response by removing barriers that separate the art from the audience.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Title: *Bug^{zzz}*: an interdisciplinary exploration of immersive staging techniques using sustainable ‘design on demand’ theatre practice.

Brief Description: Insects were the first life form to crawl out of the primordial ‘soup of creation’ on to dry land. As humans continue to forge a path to what soon may become an uninhabitable planet, many believe insects will be last surviving animals. Their ability to adapt rapidly to climate change, and persist despite ever-diminishing resources, ensures they will be around long after the last mammal expires. This research/creation project takes an archaeological look back at a failed human civilization through the lens of western civilization’s jewel of the arts, opera. In the piece, our insect characters have discovered and are attempting to perform the music, stories and dance from pages from an old opera score. As an art form, opera’s success depends on empathetic response. While social insects show no signs of empathy or even the ability to role-play, they demonstrate altruistic social behaviors, including self-sacrifice for the survival of the collective. *Bug^{zzz}*: offers two research objectives: first, the exploration of innovative, ecologically sound design practice in the creation of truly immersive art, and second, the exploration of empathetic audience response through the research project’s unique presentational form of ‘performance fusion’ . . . a distinctive blend of opera, dance and drama.

The research/creation team of *Bug^{zzz}* will explore new methods of sustainable theatre practice with the application of the latest in advanced digital technology, specifically utilizing infrared tracking technology applied to costume and set design for live theatre performance. The project will continue the research investigations into sustainable ‘design on demand’, research initiated by principle investigator William Mackwood. Co-investigator, director, choreographer and movement specialist Gwen Dobie whose research pushes the boundaries of interdisciplinary, inter-medial art, will advance the

methodological approach to the devised theatre process involving spoken text and movement with original opera composition. All this will be accomplished within the strictest sustainable theatre practice. Collaborator Don Sinclair will bring his specialized research expertise in movement-based manipulation of digital projections to the creation of the fantastical insect characters and the world they inhabit. In addition, his research and on-going exploration of the sonic world will add the necessary skills to create the audible world of insects, their voices and 'music'. Thomas Sandberg, an award winning Danish composer will work in collaboration with the writer and director to create an insects interpretation of standard opera repertoire. Thomas Sandberg is based in Copenhagen and works as composer, performer, singer, percussion soloist, and producer.

Finally, the collaboration between three departments in the Faculty of Fine Arts at York University, the Toronto arts community, and the artistic community of Copenhagen, Denmark ensures an international exchange of creative research and overall cultural benefit. The contribution of the proposed research/creation project will be demonstrated through the advancement of immersive staging techniques using sustainable 'design on demand'. Further, in reaction to Brecht's theory of *verfremdungseffekt* (distancing effect), the efficacy of creating empathetic reaction will be explored by investigating human 'mirror neuron' response in live performance by removing barriers that separate the art from the audience.

Keywords:

Design on demand, Sustainability, LED, Digital Media, Digital Projections, Infra-Red Tracking, Interactive Staging, mirror neuron, *verfremdungseffekt*, Out of the Box Productions, interdisciplinary, intermedial, immersive, performance fusion

NETWORKS

- Collaborators:

Gwen Dobie, Professor, Department of Theatre
York University

Donald Sinclair, Professor and Coordinator, Fine Arts Cultural Studies
York University

Thomas Sandberg, Composer
Copenhagen, Denmark

- Institutional Partners:

A.C. Lighting Inc. (J.F. Canuel, Managing Director)
435 Horner Avenue, Unit 1, Toronto, Ontario M8W 4W3, Canada
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BIOGRAPHY

WILLIAM J MACKWOOD, *BFA (UVic), MFA Design (UVic)*:

William is a founder and Co-Artistic Director of **Out of the Box Productions**. Over the last five years he has lead the design team for productions of *Opera Erotique*, *The Third Taboo*, *Prior Engagement* and most recently *Sound in Silence*. As a Professional Lighting Designer he has designed for, among others, **Ballet Victoria** (*Court of Miracles*, *Peter Pan*, *Alice a Wonderland of Dance*), **Kaleidoscope Theatre** (*Little Women*, *Disney's Aladdin Jr.*), and **Chemainus Theatre** (*Lost in Yonkers*, *South Pacific*, *Saint Joan*). This summer, William designed lighting for the dance creations of **Holly Small**, **Susan Cash** and **Keiko Kitano** at the World Dance Alliance in **New York City**. He also had the pleasure of design lighting for **John Oswald's** *Verisimile* at the **Canadian Art Foundation Gala** in the Carlu. On faculty in the Department of Dance at York University, William currently teaches Production and Design. The heart of his research lies in developing meaningful stories told through a 'performance fusion' supported by sustainable 'design on demand.' He is a Professional Member of the **Associated Designers of Canada**, **C.I.T.T.** and **IATSE Local 168**.

LINKS

- project websites (for Gwen Dobie and William Mackwood)

www.outoftheboxproductions.ca

Thomas Sandberg

<http://www.thomassandberg.dk/pages/UKfront.html>

Don Sinclair

<http://www.yorku.ca/dws/default.html>