



Interview with Sergio López Figueroa about the 2008 entry *Unseen Voices*



As a director of Big Bang Lab we wanted to develop a creative learning project that combined archive digitized media and the use of non verbal media which specialised in the production of music for silent films. Big Bang Lab [www.bigbang-lab.com] is a leading cultural-social enterprise that creates and delivers dynamic learning programmes and high quality productions. We combine original music with archive and silent films, both contemporary and historical. Through live performances, plus the re-use of digital media and other forms of distribution, Big Bang Lab communicates and connects people worldwide across language barriers and cultural traditions. It is the only UK creative agency that combines digital and archive media with new music in original formats, from learning to production. From concept to delivery, we engage participants and audiences alike with cultural heritage, social, environmental and contemporary issues.

This particular film was about how to use different media as a learning process, and on the other hand I was interested in seeing how I could engage young people with history and also in connecting history with contemporary issues. 'Unseen Voices' film was about the Holocaust and child refugees in historical terms as well as contemporary terms, and we were looking at the violence in London and why it is happening and connecting it with the Holocaust,



so in that sense it was intriguing for me to try to connect present and the past. The content and the emotional relationship to contemporary issues of discrimination and violence were key in starting this project.

I also wanted to assess the learning experiences of children working on a project like this and having a production company based in the school enabled children to use their range of skills. It also engaged me with the community and the social outcome was important. One of most important learning outcomes for the children was their experience of meeting a Holocaust survivor and having an intergenerational exchange. On the creative side, we used music and film in a creative way and we created a silent film purely by using archive film and composing and creating new music for a live performance for a wider audience.

There were two outcomes to this project, the process and the product. The two audiences were the people who contributed to the project, the students who were the creative makers and also the wider audience which is the schools and cultural audience. The silent film and the music

have a future life after the project as a cultural event. This was the first project created by me as a producer and was commissioned by Brent Council in London for the Holocaust Memorial Day in 2008 but we have also had the opportunity to show the film at different festivals which was very interesting. After this project I am also developing similar projects based around childhood and memories.



The timeframe on this project was quite tight and I had only about three weeks to research and prepare for the project. Delivery time took two weeks and it comprised of four stages, 1. Storyboard and Storytelling and the creative use of archive research, 2. Editing - We used iMovie as editing software and the students had to learn this software. Creating a film with one editor and fifteen children was a real challenge. 3. Music composition - We had a very short time for music composition and this was through workshops 4 - Final performance.



At a later stage, the company produced a DVD including the final film and the film process and this was distributed to one hundred schools in the Borough as a complete package. Also as part of the process we visited the

Imperial War Museum in London which has a fantastic Holocaust Exhibition. The students also met a survivor from a concentration camp and this was a very powerful and touching experience for the children. The cost of the project was ten thousand pounds and it was funded by the MLA (Museum Libraries and Archive Council). This project Unseen Voices is now actually being used by the MLA as a best practice model for the second stage of their funding program.

There were many people involved in this project. I was the Creative Director and was responsible for the content from its concept right through to its completion to the final DVD production. I also delivered music and film workshops throughout the project. There was also a project manager assistant provided by the Council and an

administration support resource. There was collaboration with a music teacher from the school and an editing assistant also. There was an external partner from the Anne Frank Trust and a survivor from a concentration camp who introduced the children to the Holocaust exhibition. There were also fourteen music students who each took part in the film and the music creation process. This



was a core group and I wanted to give power to the music making as part of the film making process and that's why we choose to work with people who played instruments at different levels. We worked exclusively with music students.

It was crucial to this project the partnership we had with Brent council and they were involved with putting the fundraising bid together. The Anne Frank Trust was involved and also the Museum Libraries and Archive Council, as well as the local libraries and the Imperial war Museum.

The most difficult challenge in creating this project was the barrier young people have in relation to black and white films and also to the concept of silent film. The initial reaction was that it was old and not interesting and the barrier had to be overcome that we were creating a silent film in the 21st century. It was a challenge trying to engage the children so they could feel a part of the whole process as this was all so very new to them. A turning point for the children was when they could use the technology to edit the film in real time and when they could analyse and



discuss it. There was also a barrier about the idea of truth and the children thought that any black and white film would represent the truth just because it was old. We had interesting discussions about the ideas of political propaganda and I encouraged them to be independent thinkers. On the music side, there is always a tendency to use music based on your own personal taste so there was a challenge here in making the children understand why we used old pieces of music.

It's hard to evaluate at this stage the educational impact this project has had to date even though the DVD has been sent to one hundred schools as I haven't yet received any feedback from the teachers. The DVDs can also be found in libraries but it's still too soon to evaluate its impact. This project was the starting point for me for creating a model on how to engage people in the use of archive media, and when I received an award from the British Council as part of the cultural leadership program, this then led me from Brent to Delhi.

Delhi City Symphony (www.delhi-citysymphony.com) is another creative learning project which encompasses music, film and heritage involving thirty children with a history of child trafficking and labour in Delhi. It involved the creation of a new silent digital film about Delhi and a new live soundtrack in collaboration with classical Indian musicians. The project was showcased at the World Heritage Day on April 18 2008. This film aims to engage people with their local community and heritage in a dynamic way. These children had no previous exposure to any type of music or media training and the children



used archival footage which they then used as basic material to construct their own film. The children then shot new material and in this process, the kids learnt editing, camera skills and music creation, and as a result their self confidence was boosted during the whole process. It was a very successful project and has now evolved into an International project. The film was inspired by experimental silent films like 'Berlin, Symphony of a Great City'. I have been surprised by how many young people from different cultural backgrounds become so interested in film making where there are no spoken words. There is a clip on YouTube about this particular project which I am sure you will find interesting

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FHgGQzfKiQ.

Another project I worked on was a music and maths initiative with graphic notation using basic geometry to create rhythmic patterns using balloons as musical instruments to accompany short animation. This was a very experimental method of creating music and it has very distinctive and unique sound.

I would say to anyone who is considering applying for these awards to read the guidelines and be as objective and critical of your own work as possible. Don't be afraid to apply even if you think that your work does not use the latest technology, trends or tools. We live in a technology era that can put too much emphasis on the tools and not the content. It is also a useful and healthy process to test and compare your project in a wider context. My advice is to be creative with your project and if you are happy with it, then just apply!