

MAY 14, 2016

Improviser-in-Residence 2015-16 Douglas R. Ewart

Feedback and Reflections

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Improviser-in-Residence 2015-16



CREPUSCULE GUELPH MAY 2016

Crepuscule is a large-scale collaborative improvised arts event. It was held at Guelph's Arboretum on Saturday May 14th, 2016.

Crepuscule brings together diverse people and communities from all walks of life in a massive and organized improvisation. I want us to remember that life is rewarding and worth living—even with its current obstacles and challenges. – Douglas R. Ewart

WHY SEEK FEEDBACK?

We care, and are curious, about the role of arts participation in communities. We seek to learn from our experiences and to better understand the impacts of our programming on individuals and communities. We want to hear what we have done well and what we could do better.

We are grateful to our survey respondents and to the large group who supported the residency (Team Crepuscule!) for their frank, thoughtful responses to our questions. While not all of their comments appear here, we have reviewed and learned from each one.



HOW WE SOUGHT FEEDBACK

Print Survey

Distributed in participant information packages and at the event.

Online Survey

Circulated by e-mail to participant group leaders, via social media to participants, linked from the program.

Team Debrief

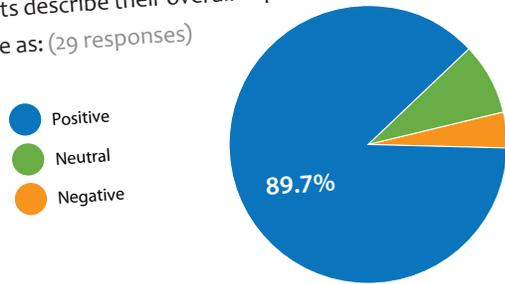
Team Crepuscule did a focus group-style reflection and evaluation post-event.



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WHAT WE HEARD...

Participants describe their overall experience at Crepuscule as: (29 responses)



AN OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

An amazing 90% of respondents described their overall experience at Crepuscule as a positive one.

“There were so many lovely musical moments and the overall vibe of the event was amazing.”

“The positive energy was great, everyone was very friendly and inclusive. It was awesome.”

“My favourite part was processing from the pond to the opening circle, and the opening circle before announcements. It was awesome to feel the buzz and the energy being generated by the crowd.”

Connections & Relationships

“It was great to see so many varied people and communities working and art-ing together!”

“So great to meet so many new faces from the community!”

“The interactions with other artists was a great opportunity for our participants to feel included in a creative and artistic experience.”



Co-creation & Inspiration

“I was able to improvise with wonderful people of all ages, skill levels and disciplines.”

[I enjoyed] “Being exposed to expressions (artistic) which were new to me. And thinking, ‘That is wonderful.’”

“Great combination of structure and fluidity.”

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IMPACTS AND VALUE

Respondents identified a range of values and meanings to Crepuscule, including personal, creative, relational, and even spiritual ones. These responses show, as expected, that the event had different meanings depending on people's engagement, personal contexts, and values. All the same, there are shared threads woven through the responses, telling us that Crepuscule enabled something resonant, connecting, and meaningful for the majority of respondents.

“Any event that brings community and creativity together is valuable for the human spirit.”

“Unconventional artistic events implicitly question the conventions not only of every other artistic experience, but also of social, political, and, perhaps, spiritual experiences generally.”

“I think that it was an amazing community building event and connected the arts community.”



PERCEIVED VALUE

Respondents were asked, “Do you see a value to projects like Crepuscule? If so, please describe.” 24 of 29 respondents offered very positive comments like the ones above.

One respondent felt that factors like weather and communication had made it difficult to achieve Crepuscule's vision. Another simply stated, “I wish it was an annual event.”



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CHALLENGES: PROCESS

Team Crepuscule consisted of students, staff, and researchers from three organizations, working collaboratively to realize Douglas' vision. Our main challenges were with timelines – which felt tight for complex sets of interdependent tasks such as finalizing pods (groups of participating artists), and recruiting volunteers – and communication – with flow of information and delegation of roles sometimes unclear given the number of people involved across sites. Managing the pod budget was also difficult toward the end as new players popped up in the final weeks.



LESSONS LEARNED: PROCESS

Upon reflection, Team Crepuscule agreed that, if we were to do this again, we would arrange to have Douglas resident in Guelph for a longer period leading up to the event. His presence and direct conversations made an enormous difference in securing participants, and in creating clarity across the team about event details. We also learned that it would be a good idea to emphasize the site walkthrough more heavily, ensuring that pods (groups of participating artists) had a clear sense of expectations, layout, and flow before arriving at the event. We would move all timelines back to ensure smooth planning and better publicity.

CHALLENGES: EVENT

The biggest challenges attendees faced at Crepuscule were: 1. The cold weather (mentioned by 16 respondents); 2. A lack of clarity about timing and order of events, and not enough interaction among pods (12); 3. The length and discomfort – lack of seating, cold – of the opening circle (9). People felt strongly that this had been inappropriate, describing it as feeling like “an obligatory seminar” rather than a collaborative celebration. The event also started late.



LESSONS LEARNED: EVENT

In future, we will have a clearer communication strategy about the need to dress and plan appropriately. Clearer communication and planning could have helped us to prepare volunteers to signal shifts in the program. In future we will arrange seating for those who need it – a serious oversight in the circles – and keep scripts for honoring community elders and introducing sponsors concise.

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REFLECTIONS, MOVING AHEAD

Having reviewed the survey responses and team debrief notes with care, we can state with confidence that Crepuscule was generally warmly-received and deeply appreciated by most participants. The event created a sense of community cohesion and creative energy that are deeply valued by artists and community members, and there is an appetite for more events like this one. This is a great sign of the importance of this complex and very rewarding work.

The challenges and obstacles experienced by some participants and noted by Team Crepuscule are worth taking seriously. The team has already adapted its process and plans in response to this feedback, and I recommend that Team Improviser-in-Residence returns to this report and to the larger set of responses as we gear up for future large-scale events. There is much to be learned from our engagement with our communities, and from their frank and generous feedback.



SOME FINAL WORDS FROM OUR RESPONDENTS:

“[It] would be really helpful if the director of the group visited each group before the event, perhaps, and then would be better able to integrate the different groups together.”

“Creativity is like fire and we are the logs - this event allowed for an enormous flame.”

“There is considerable value in just seeing, hearing, and meeting others at such events, and realizing there is a common ground.”



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