

The Departments of Music and Architecture have entered into an unusual collaboration to explore their mutual interest in sound and space, through a two-year project called Sounding Architecture.

The project had its seeds in classroom collaborations – each department was doing work that touched on the other discipline and so sought their advice – but has quickly evolved to be a platform for knowledge exchange and, it is hoped, research. It is funded by HKU’s Interdisciplinary Knowledge Exchange Project Scheme.

“Sound and space have been a topic of study for quite a while in music, but this project is more focused in that it comes specifically from architecture. I can’t think of many collaborations like this,” said Dr José Vicente Neglia, Assistant Professor of Music.



Students perform on self-constructed instruments at the Asia Society Hong Kong Center in April 2016

The connections between the two departments began to form in 2015 when music students were asked to construct instruments for an Asia Society concert that drew on the sculptural designs of Harry Partch. It was decided they needed design and construction advice, and contact was made with a former student of Associate Professor of Architecture Thomas Tsang. This soon developed into direct contact between the two departments.

Mr Tsang subsequently asked music staff to lead a workshop on sound for his students, a topic he felt was often neglected in architecture.

“Architects design space and let engineers test the acoustics. They have been focused on looking but not listening. These are fundamentals we have forgotten,” he said.

Music Assistant Lecturer, Dr Deborah Waugh, elaborated on their involvement. “When musicians walk through spaces, we always hear the space and we react to that space. If architects can do the same, it would be fantastic,” she said. “We have been trying

to raise their sound awareness through the vehicle of music, by having them make musical instruments and see how they sound in different spaces. The same principles about sound that they learn through this can be applied to an office or a library or an outdoor space.”

Both departments gradually saw the potential of further collaboration and in September they launched their KE project at a symposium called “Towards a Manifesto: Sounding Architecture”.

They will be organising workshops and talks leading up to an installation, exhibition and performance, which will all be open to the public. External collaborators are also involved, including the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble and the arts organisation Spring Workshop. American composers Ken Ueno and Eli Marshall have also visited and worked with students in both departments on developing instruments and sounds, helping the project to gain momentum.

Dr Waugh said it was exciting to approach their field in a new way and to give students in both disciplines the chance to stretch outside their comfort zones.

“Generally these days students play mass-produced instruments. To have the opportunity to use heavy-duty machines like industrial saws to create musical instruments, and then perform on these instruments, gives students enormous freedom,” she said. “Essentially this project is bringing together many different people interested in exploring all the issues surrounding sound and space.”

THE ART OF GUQIN, CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY & PAINTING

The Faculty joined the Department of Music and the Music Library, the University of Hong Kong Libraries, to host an evening with award-winning musician and calligrapher Mr Sou Si-tai on October 27, 2016. Mr Sou is the Chairman of the Deyin Qin Society of Hong Kong and performs frequently in Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Japan, Europe and the United States. The playing of the *guqin* bears a strong similarity to the brushwork and technique of traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting. The lecture invited a comparison between these artistic expressions and featured live performances by Mr Sou of *qin* compositions.