

อนิจจัง - Anicca (Impermanence)

by Prommas Team

Philosophy

“Anicca” is a collaborative project that aims to produce a cross-cultural art piece. The work mainly consists of three fields, which are music, dance, and visual art. All of them are combined to challenge the concept of expectation and reality, while implementing materials from Thai traditional culture.

In order for oneself to expect something, one needs to have a prior standpoint toward that matter. Therefore, we based our work on two traditional beliefs of our country: Buddhist teaching about “anicca”, and the fictional character “Hanuman”. Anicca literally means impermanence, it is the dharma that teaches us to be aware of the uncertainty of our life. In contrast, Hanuman comes from traditional literature. He was a descendent of the god of wind and possessed immortality. Basing our work on two contradicting matters, we believe that the audiences would be able to interpret and expect this work in various ways, while experiencing Thai traditional culture in today’s context.

Working Process

1. Meetings
 - Connecting and constructing the project from Thai traditional literature character, Hanuman & one of the highest Buddhist teachings, anicca (impermanence) under the theme of “Expectation vs. Reality”.
 - Concluding and originating the Art theme. “*East meet West*”, which are combining Thai traditional & Western contemporary art together via music, visual arts, and performing arts (dancing)
 - Direct a storyline that will be told throughout the performance.
2. Compose a brand new piece.
3. Each art discipline will interpret the given piece and add some scheme to the performance.
 - Musicians rehearsed their own individual parts then rehearsed together.
 - The Composer designed the electronic sounds and effects.
 - Dancers choreographed their dance moves.
 - Visual artists designed and created the visuals.
4. Each unit was scheduled to record and shoot the performance by the visual team. The saxophone quartet had also recorded the audio of the piece.
5. Editor assembled and edited the performance project.

Approaches of each artistic field

Music

The whole music in this video is a new piece specifically composed for this project. Therefore, the concept that was explained above will all be integrated in the musical elements of this composition. Focusing on the differences between expectation and reality, the composer created this work with the materials from Thai traditional culture, while using western's contemporary tools and techniques.

The reason that the composer decided to write for saxophone quartet and Thai flutes is the fact that all of them are woodwind instruments. That relates to the tales of Hanuman, the main character of the story. Hanuman is a son of the god of the wind, and his ability to resurrect would only come when the wind blows.

Regarding the harmonic structure, it is mainly constructed by Thai music's pitch organizing system, with some derived from spectral analysis. At the same time, the microtonal differences between two different temperaments are emphasized, especially at the moment that two Thai flutes are playing along with another two saxophones. That reflects the unmet expectation of both individual sides, sounding disharmony from either perspective.

The electronic tools also play an essential part in this work, mainly in two ways. The first way is to directly use the recordings and samplings, such as the recitation at the beginning of the work, or the samples of Thai percussion. However, another usage is more important, and is serving the main concept of expectations. The sound effects are created by processing the original sound, either acoustic saxophone's recording or samples of Thai instruments, using techniques such as filtering, modulating, or pitch shifting, in the Max/MSP Program. That will create ambiguous moments in the music, being on the borderline whether what the audience is hearing is only a synthesized sound or a real acoustic sound.

Dance

The main character Hanuman, will be acting and dancing in a Thai traditional dance style called Khon. Khon is one of the world's ancient high-class which each Khon dance will be classified according to the character they are interpreting in this particular performance, the monkey. For the contemporary dancers, they are dancing and interpreting Hanuman's afterlife abstract.

Art direction and video production

Since there's no narrator or any dialogue in the performance, the visual arts team chose symbolic signs to portray the message such as folding flowers showing that the character was recalling memories. Hanuman's death scene was a pastiche from Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho, making the scene more obvious.

Moreover, we applied Lacan's Mirror Stage Concept which explains the conflict between self awareness and the image in the mirror. By memorizing the picture of oneself in the mirror, it creates two different perceptions in our mind: self alienation, and narcissism.

In the film industry, reflected images in the mirror are often used as a sign to describe the hidden identity, or subconscious mind. In our performance we used reflected images of Hanuman to show Hanuman's subconscious that he had been afraid of death all the time but Hanuman decided to hide it in his subconscious mind and expect to be immortal.

Impressions & Observations

Here're our impressions and observations during and of the project.

Impression

We are more than excited to introduce myths and literature from Thailand and South East Asia to an international stage, also combining and establishing a new performance consisting of 3 art disciplines: music, visual arts, and dance.

Observations

Another thought with which we have come up during this project is the fact that the expectation and the reality might not necessarily be contrary to one another as we first thought. We can expect something, and then it comes true. For instance, our team had had the depictions of how our outcome video would look like since the first meeting. We have been working hard on realizing this project, although the final outcome does not match every exact detail as we pictured in our head before, we actually achieved it.

Behind the scenes

