

CULTURE NIGHT SLIGO: AROUND NORTH @ THE MODEL

TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2015

Culture Night was in full swing last Friday in Sligo as I curiously made my way to The Model Arts Centre in pursuit of the sound installation, **Around North**.

The installation was created by composer/artist Robert Jarvis - a man who has worked far and wide collaborating and creating works of art, music, and sounds, establishing himself as an esteemed creator with years of experience under his belt. It's no wonder Jarvis won *Best New Media* at *The British Composer Awards*, 2005 and 2006, as well as being shortlisted for the *New Music Award*, 2008. Needless to say, I was eagerly anticipating covering **Around North** for Culture Night, and this was before I knew the artist himself would be attending!



When I arrived at **The Model** it was, of course, as it normally is: wonderfully humming with visitors and what appeared to be a tour of young art enthusiasts who were, perhaps, a bit too enthusiastic for the installation I was expecting to see; but once they filtered out - before I could even see where **Around North** was being presented - I could hear it.

Before I had the pleasure of meeting the man of the moment, I wanted to experience the art work for myself, so resisting the urge to lie slap-dab in the centre of the installation, I sociably took a seat along the side, only to later envy the fearless ladies who did plonk themselves down right in the middle - and rightly so. The sound installation was, simply, eight speakers set up to

resemble North, South, East, and West around the outskirts of the room, with a small blue light placed on top of each one, except for one speaker which had two, this I guessed was North.

As I sat listening to the sporadic bass notes protruding from different speakers each time - some long, crackling and drawn out, others shorter, breathy and quieter - I spotted Jarvis and took the opportunity to ask him about the concept behind **Around North**. Jarvis explained how, “the inspiration for the project came on a visit to the Armagh observatory.” He wondered, “if the stars were a musical instrument, how would they sound?” He continued to explain how he came up with a plan to have one or more virtual lines coming down from celestial north and every time a star crosses one of these lines it would generate a sound, similar to the workings of a music box. It was clear to see how passionate Jarvis is about his work. He went on to explain that each star had a unique sound depending on their astronomical characteristics: brightness, size and distance from the earth. Stars that sound deeper are bigger, stars that are louder are closer, and stars that have a crackling sound are hotter. I wondered how long a project of this scope could take to complete, to which Jarvis informed me, “5 years!” Both impressed and informed I returned to my seat to try and absorb and comprehend the sounds of the installation, so that I might try and paint a picture for you (the readers) of what the experience was like. How do I do that? Well I’ll try my best.

Since it is purely a sound installation, The Model’s always busy atmosphere allowed for only a sample of what the installation had to offer, but that being said, during the quieter moments when the sound of the stars had time to resonate with me, I felt there was a meditative presence with each note, which unexpectedly struck a primitive part of me - just how I imagine our ancestors felt looking up to the night sky, this sound installation creates a new and dynamic way in which to experience the stars.

This is a new medium in which to explore celestial phenomena and I must admit, it did make me feel closer to the stars. The experience of **Culture Night** and **The Model**, as always, did not disappoint!

If you’re interested in experiencing **Around North** for yourself, there will be a gallery installation in Newtownards next month, (make sure to keep an eye out for that one!) It is also permanently installed in the grounds of the Armagh Observatory, which I will absolutely be visiting in the near future. It may have been 5 years in the making but this might be just the beginning.

Don’t forget to check out the always captivating [Model Gallery Sligo](#) for a full programme of events and exhibitions.

Header: Jim Cooper

<http://www.nitelife.ie>

Katie Jane Queenan



This lady with the double-barrel name is also the double-barrel creative type; she’s a visual artist and a writer (some of us are born with all the talent). Originally from Roscommon and now living in a mountain-side thatched cottage in Sligeach, this beure definitely knows her Picasso from her Palsa!