

The Garden of Sight, Sound and Surprise

Andrew Brian Filmer¹, Yeoh Pei Ann², Mohd Firdaus bin Mohd Anuar^{3*},
Maslisa Zainuddin³

¹ Institute of Music, UCSI University

² Faculty of Music, UiTM Shah Alam,

³ Department of Art, Design & Media, Sunway University

Corresponding Authors: *firdausa@sunway.edu.my³, yeohpei@uitm.edu.my

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SUMMARY OR ARTWORK

The Garden of Sight, Sound and Surprise, a three-day experimental performance event at UiTM Shah Alam Creative Media Hub, offered audiences a multisensory exploration of the intersection between music and visual art. The event brought together a collaborative team featuring musicians Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrew Filmer and Dr. Yeoh Pei Ann, artist Maslisa Zainuddin, media artist Firdaus Anuar, and student assistant Aru Nariman. Through a format that evolved over three days, the performance gradually took shape, experimenting in new ways to weave different art forms, and in its humble way, offering something fresh to the conversation around the practice.

Evolution of the Garden Series

The current version represents the third episode in an evolving artistic exploration. Episode 1, which was the first ever collaboration between Maslisa Zainuddin, Dr. Andrew Filmer, and Firdaus Anuar, conducted in a performing arts studio at Sunway University during the partial COVID-19 lockdown of 2022. This initial experiment with pandemic restrictions, established the foundational relationship between musical performance and visual art response that would become the project's blueprint.

Advancing from the initial format, Episode 2 developed into the inclusion of live audience and projection mapping, marking a pivotal transition from private experimentation to public performance, as well as new media artwork integration. For this episode, Firdaus Anuar incorporated archival footage from Episode 1 into the exhibition, projecting it onto a wall while also creating a projection mapping on a two-sided box that simultaneously displayed Maslisa and Andrew performing simultaneously. While documenting the project's development, this technical format invites conversation between past and current performances, adding a layered timeline to the experience

Day 1: Exhibition and Opening

The third episode started by featuring an exhibition showcasing documentation of past episodes, providing essential context for the project's evolution. Together with Firdaus Anuar's visual documentation, Maslisa's paintings from Episode 1 and in Episode 2 were prominently showcased, allowing attendees to understand the theoretical model and procedural development underlying the performance practice. Video recordings of the previous episodes were embedded in Augmented Reality application Zappar to each painting exhibited. This framing highlighted how each rendition has refined the methodologies for creating interdisciplinary dialogue between music and visual art.

Day 2: Interactive Workshop

The second day featured an interactive illustration-to-music workshop that engaged UiTM Shah Alam participants in the creative process. With minimal guidance, attendees experienced translating musical stimuli into visual expression through illustration. What distinguished this workshop was its reversal of the traditional process - after creating their works, participants presented their visual output to the musicians, who then interpreted the visual artwork through musical improvisation (Filmer, 2025, 1:25). This reciprocal exchange served as a form of data validation for the project's underlying theory, demonstrating how the translation processes between art forms could be bidirectional rather than unidirectional. This aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) Multimodal Theory, which suggests that meaning is created across multiple communication modes that interact with and transform one another.

Day 3: Main Performance

The final performance on the third day marks the full realization of the project's experimental vision. Dr. Yeoh and Dr. Filmer improvisation on violin and viola leads the structure and the mood of the performance, with Dr. Filmer occasionally changed instruments to triangle and plucking on his viola strings and experimentally drumming on the pedestal, which pushed the sonic experience beyond traditional boundaries.

As the musicians performed, artist Maslisa Zainuddin engaged in a fluid exchange in real-time, creating visual works that unfold sounds, textures, and emotional waves to work with her mark-making. Brushstrokes echoed shifts in energy, lines traced the arc of collective improvisation, and color choices emerged as a kind of call-and-response. This iteration leaned into the unpredictability of live creation, honoring the chemistry of two art forms coexisting in real time.

Firdaus captured intricate details of the performance – the musicians' concentrated movements, the rhythmic movement between all the strokes, facial expressions, and the atmosphere. Aru Nariman fed the live visuals of the performance and projected them on the wall, providing different angles and depth to the live performance. This technical dimension created a framework for ongoing data validation of the project's theoretical model. By capturing and displaying the creative process in real-time, audiences could directly observe the relationships between musical gestures and visual responses, providing immediate feedback on the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary translation.

Artistic Achievement

The Garden of Sight, Sound and Surprise succeeded in creating a genuinely experimental space where established artistic disciplines could be deconstructed and reimaged. Moving fluidly between classical technique and experimental approaches, Dr. Filmer's willingness to employ his viola in unconventional ways—as percussion, as a plucked instrument as well as introducing other audio expiration with triangles and expressive drumming on the pedestal—reflected a commitment to expanding the expressive potential of his instrument. Similarly, Dr. Yeoh's violin performance bridged classical precision with exploratory sound-making.

Maslisa Zainuddin's visual responses demonstrated remarkable sensitivity to musical nuance, translating sound into form, color, and movement with intuitive understanding. Firdaus and Aru similarly used their own instruments of light and projection to further explore the connection beyond conventional canvas and sonic realm.

Conclusion

The Garden of Sight, Sound and Surprise at UiTM Shah Alam Creative Media Hub represents a humble exploration of artistic practice in Malaysia. By structuring the event as a three-day progression—from exhibition to workshop to performance—the organizers created a bite-sized, comprehensive experience that engaged audience members as both spectators and participants in the creative process.

The integration of traditional artistic disciplines with new media technology points toward exciting possibilities for future experimental performances. Most importantly,

the event demonstrated how breaking down barriers between artistic disciplines can generate new modes of expression and experience that would be impossible within the confines of a single medium.

References

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold Publishers

Andrew Filmer. (2025, March 3). *The Garden of Sight, Sound, and Surprise | Episode 3*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdQ-kIKs_ZA