

SO! Amplifies: Yvon Bonenfant's Voice Bubbles App

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Abstract

SO! Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome! — During a preview of the UK tour of my performance *Beacons*, I noticed something intriguing.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Aesthetics, Children's Issues, Cultural Studies, Dance/Movement, Digital Media

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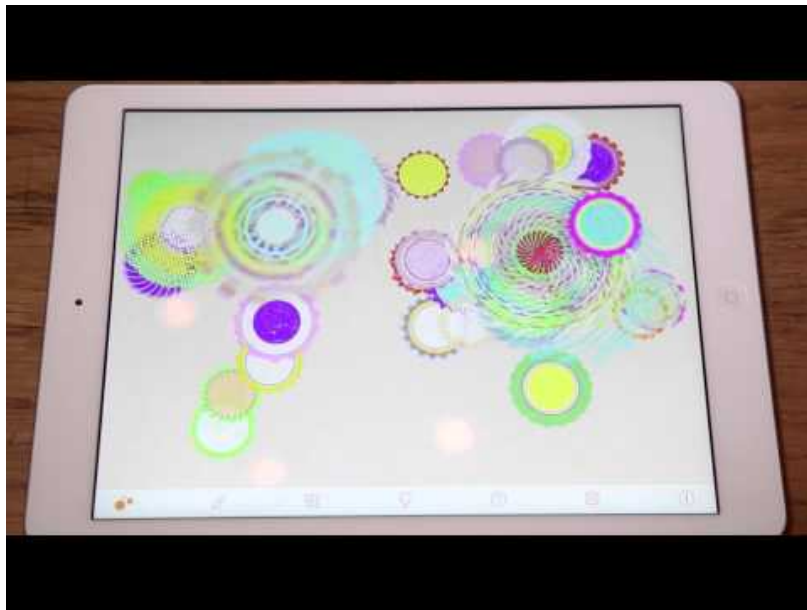
SO! Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome!

During a preview of the UK tour of my performance [Beacons](#), I noticed something intriguing. There were a couple of children in the audience, and they were singing along with me. I mean, not just singing – doing all kinds of vocal things along with me.

You have to understand that I'm an extended – or I now prefer the term extra-normal – vocalist. I make artwork from the 'weird' qualities of the voice. Now, the term weird, when it comes to the voice, is always culturally relative. But let's face it – in almost any of the industrialized cultures, we don't exactly let the voice go wild, and so the category of "weird" is pretty large and full. Our cultures are a Freudian fiesta of vocal repression and sublimation. When's the last time you heard a heartfelt, loose, easy series of adult sobs at a business meeting, or a wail of deep mourning at a funeral? When it comes to the voice, we're pretty uptight.

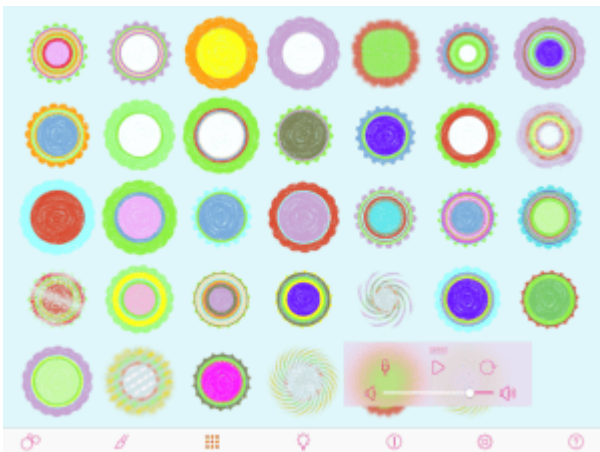
However, here were some children absolutely letting loose and going along for the ride. This has happened before. During my piece [Soie Soyeuse](#), during which I wrap the audience in habotai silk, some children got right into it. I was five feet away making really incredibly 'ugly' chewing noises and groans of gnashing teeth and they delightedly voiced along.

Right now, everything's becoming user-driven. The audience loves to co-make art. And why not? So I thought: let's go for broke, here. Let's try to create some environments and experiences in which kids (and the kid in all of us) can really explore what their voices can do. Let's give them freedom to experiment. Let's reward them for wildness. Let's try to make it child and family friendly, but beautiful and rich and somehow sensual, despite the limitations of the tablet format. I worked like a dog to get financing. I collaborated with scientists. And so, Voice Bubbles for iPad was born.



<https://youtu.be/pTfj9LkhZhY>

It's free, thanks to [our funders](#). It's got no silly pop up ads and in-app purchases. Kids love it and will use it for hours, happily. It lets them record, improvise, structure and add effects to their voices. They can play back little sequences or structured phrases. They can fool with what else their voices can do and be.



It makes them feel, and makes we adults question, just why we need to keep the voice so under wraps when it's a source of so much playful joy and intense engagement. Give it to a child to enjoy. Enjoy it yourself.

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www.voicebubblesapp.com or from [the app store](#).

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*You can explore other related artworks at www.yourvivaciousvoice.com

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Yvon Bonenfant is Reader in Performing Arts at the University of Winchester. He likes voices that do what voices don't usually do, and he likes bodies that don't do what bodies usually do. He makes art starting from these sounds and movements. These unusual, intermedia works have been produced in 10 countries in the last 10 years, and his writing published in journals such as *Performance Research*, *Choreographic Practices*, and *Studies in Theatre and Performance*. He currently holds a Large Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust and funding from Arts Council England to collaborate with speech scientists on the development of a series of participatory, extra-normal voice artworks for children and families; see www.yourvivaciousvoice.com. Despite his air of Lenin, he does frighteningly accurate vocal imitations of both Axl Rose and Jon Bon Jovi. www.yvonbonenfant.com.

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