

Sonic Cradle lands spot in TED exhibition

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A Simon Fraser University graduate student project that melds music, meditation and modern technology has landed a rare spot as an exhibit at TEDActive 2012 in Palm Springs, California this month.

Jay Vidyarthi's project, Sonic Cradle, allows individuals to use their breathing to shape musical sounds while they sit suspended in a totally dark chamber. The experience is described as "meditation for the non-meditator."

"The idea grew from my desire to explore how technology can be used to free us from the stress associated with information overload," says Vidyarthi, who is pursuing a master's degree in SFU Surrey's School of Interactive Arts and Technology.

Vidyarthi and his supervisor Bernhard Riecke, who heads up SIAT's new iSpace lab, have been invited to display Sonic Cradle as part of the prestigious TEDActive TechArt exhibition. During the week-long conference participants will be able to try 15-minute meditative sessions.

Vidyarthi, who is also working with co-supervisor Diane Gromala, director of SFU's Transforming Pain research group, says the project was accepted despite being primarily a design research artifact rather than a piece of art.

Developed last spring, Sonic Cradle provides a digitized compendium of musical sound bites from 30 musicians from across North America, including recordings of falling rain, flute and guitar arrangements,

meditative chimes and even spoken poetry.

Breathing stimulates the [sound patterns](#), which are unique to each 'cradle' visit, says Vidyarthi, a musician who earlier studied psychophysics and neuroscience at McGill University.

"As an interactive medium, the project shows that a well-designed, minimalist system that embodies an understanding of [human psychology](#) can engage people in a way which provides psychological benefit," Vidyarthi says.

Sonic Cradle demonstrates technology's potential to be engaging and immersive without being over-stimulating, he adds. "It may pave the way for more systems which reject the typical goals of productivity in favour of self-knowledge, inner peace and a sense of calm."

The researchers plan further study on how the system physiologically affects people. The creation of a handheld mobile version of Sonic Cradle is also possible.

As the one who has spent the most time in Sonic Cradle, Vidyarthi says, "when you remove all the distractions, it can feel something like leaving the planet."

More information: www.jayvidyarthi.com/cradle

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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