



Interview with Thea Rossen

What is 'Drip Drop Play'?

Drip Drop Play is an immersive experience using ice and water to create sound that involves children in improvising, listening and performing.

What age groups did you work with during this season at ArtPlay?

We worked with 2-5 year olds, 5-8 year olds and 9-12 year olds.

How did children of different ages respond?

It was thrilling to see how engrossed children aged from 2 to 12 years were with both the water and ice phases of the sessions. We found that the majority of children were quickly engaged by the activities in both rooms and although some children did leave early, we generally found it difficult to get the participants to leave the space as they wanted to continue exploring.

We varied the tasks according to the age group in each session. For example, in the water section, the older children were encouraged to compose short pieces with the sounds they discovered and then perform them for the group, whereas the younger children were allowed more general exploration time and encouraged to work more with their parents to discover sounds. The tasks kept the majority of the children engaged and allowed them to freely explore the sounds and rooms. We were also pleased to see that children in the 5-8 and above age brackets worked quite readily with children they didn't know in the composition part of the workshops.

The shows were most popular with 2-5 year olds, even though some of these younger children did not want to sit down during the water demonstrations!

What do you think it was about the project that appealed to such a wide range of ages?

This project grew out of an installation that was for adults as part of a musical performance. We noticed that after the shows people of all ages, including children, wanted to come up and see the ice and water and touch or play with it. Water and ice are mediums that children interact with every day, perhaps without considering their sonic potential. Presenting such familiar materials in a new way made it easy for the children to get involved straight away and gave parents lots of fun ideas to try at home.

Did you do anything different with each age group?

After the first few shows we realised that the younger age groups needed more direction to find their way through the tasks so we introduced a call and response melody for them. We also discussed strategies with the ArtPlay support staff to help children who didn't want to sit down during the water demonstrations. These included having a lower water bowl and allowing the particularly restless children to continue to play quietly while we demonstrated the next section of the work. This worked surprisingly well as the majority of children

were fascinated enough by what we were doing to sit still and not be distracted by the few children who continued to play. We found this to be a much calmer option than parents restraining a crying or yelling child during this time. It made for a happier experience for everyone involved. With the older age groups, we either used a whispered version of the listening melody or did not use it at all, to create a more mature experience for these children.

During the water improvisation/sound exploration we encouraged children to work with each other to compose their music. We found this was a very effective way for children in the older age groups to make new friends and for younger children to play with their parents. As the season progressed we included more composition based exercises for the older age groups because it allowed them to extend their skills and have the opportunity to perform at the end as well.

Did you face any challenges when working with children of different ages?

It was sometimes challenging to alter the structure of the workshop to cater for the different age groups. For example, in some sessions we had a very wide range of ages and it was difficult to provide the older children with enough challenges while simultaneously allowing the younger children to continue exploring. In our planning we probably focused a little too specifically on what to do for each age group and needed more time to try out some cross age group strategies.

There were a small number of younger children who were afraid of the dark. As the lights were quite low, this was a challenge at times. All of these children did calm down and enjoy themselves once they realised what was inside, though sometimes this was not until half way through the show. We were able to work around this with the help of ArtPlay staff who took families out into the lighter space and talked them through the experience until they felt they were able to come and join in again.

We used different titles to distinguish between each age group's shows but found that this was confusing to some members of the public who were not sure which ones were part of 'Drip Drop Play'. In future, we would spend more time developing a marketing strategy that clearly associated each age group's show with the central concept of the project.

What did you learn about children of different ages from this experience that you'll take into consideration in your future work with Drip Drop Play or with other projects?

In the sessions with the older children we were surprised by how quickly children made friends with each other and worked together on their compositions. We also learned that the children really enjoyed having a chance to perform their compositions. We quickly realised that while we provided an overall structure for the younger groups it was important to leave them time to freely explore the sounds in the space.

In every show a child discovered a brand new sound that we had never heard before. We loved being a part of this constant journey of discovery. It has shown us just how important it is to make art with children and for children. Thank you ArtPlay!