

Movies

Live, interactive film at Luminato blurs real and fiction, cinema and theatre

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Posted: 06/24/2015 11:17 AM | Last Modified: 06/24/2015 3:27 PM | [Comments: 0](#)

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TORONTO - There are a slew of things that can go wrong on a movie set. And there are a slew of things that can go wrong on a live broadcast shoot.

Combine those two endeavours — and require that it involve a roving cast and crew, just one camera, one long continuous shot and comments from a live viewing audience — and you've got a mammoth challenge for director Matt Adams.



Blast Theory arts group Nick Tandavanitj, Ju Row Farr and Matt Adams shown here in an undated file photo. The group's film project, entitled "My One Demand" will be shown as part of the Luminato festival. THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO

The British multimedia artist and his team stage their live film "My One Demand" three times this week for Toronto's Luminato Festival.

"It's insanely challenging and to our knowledge has never been done before," says Adams, co-founder of the U.K.-based arts group Blast Theory.

"There are films that have been shot in one take but they had a number of different tries at their one take and then picked the one. So, it's very ambitious cinematically. It's also interactive so the audience, whether they're watching in the cinema or online, can interact and the script is updated and changed in real-time by the audience."

The shoot, expected to last a couple of hours and cover eight kilometres of ground, follows seven people as they individually set out across Toronto at sunset.

A narrator provides information as one traveller meets the next, with each person older than the last. It begins with a six-week-old baby leaving a downtown hospital in his mother's arms and ends with a woman in her mid-70s at the edge of the city.

Viewers can contribute to the project by answering questions that pop up throughout the story, which is about unrequited love. Those answers will be received by Adams in a control room, where he will stitch selected responses into the narrator's script.

"The thing that characterizes all of Blast Theory's work is interactivity and thinking about how audiences may be given agency within an artwork," explains Adams, based in Brighton, England, with partners Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj.

"(We explore) that sense that there's this porous boundary between what you're watching and this world.... And that the project is walking this edge between real and fictional."

It's also a hybrid between cinema and theatre, since it's essentially a live performance, he adds.

"Anything can happen — we're in the streets of Toronto, we're not closing any streets or anything. So people goofing around in the background and waving at it, cops saying, 'Excuse me, can I just see your permit?', all of that, any of that, is possible."

Often concerned with social, political and privacy issues surrounding technology, Blast Theory's past projects include an interactive "drama" for the U.K. broadcaster Channel 4, which allowed people to text a fictional teen eager to over-share the minutiae of her life.

Currently, they're gathering anonymized data from a mobile app dubbed "Karen by Blast Theory." It features a digital life coach who draws personal details from users who answer questions based on actual psychological and digital profiling tests.

"If our era is remembered for anything it will be remembered as the age of the personal computer and the Internet," says Adams.

"And that is the sort of most profound social, political and commercial and cultural change. We're keen to kind of immerse ourselves in that and see how you can make work that is open to different voices but still retains a strong point of view and a clear artistic vision."

Despite the various technical challenges, Adams says he doesn't expect "My One Demand" to be that difficult to mount.

"The thing is doing all of that (at the same time). The largest thing is that the stream will break at certain moment — I think we feel that's a guarantee that Sod's law says it will fall over at some point," he says.

"And so what we've done is developed the script so that is part of the experience."