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Festival celebrates Schuylkill waters.

Splashes of artistry

By Stephan Salisbury
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The Water Department, generally attentive to unusual drips and noisy leaks, has decided to let the waters flow.

On Sunday, the city's most unlikely impresario continues its flirtation with the arts by staging a festival at the Fairmount Water Works, the neoclassical gem on the bank of the Schuylkill behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

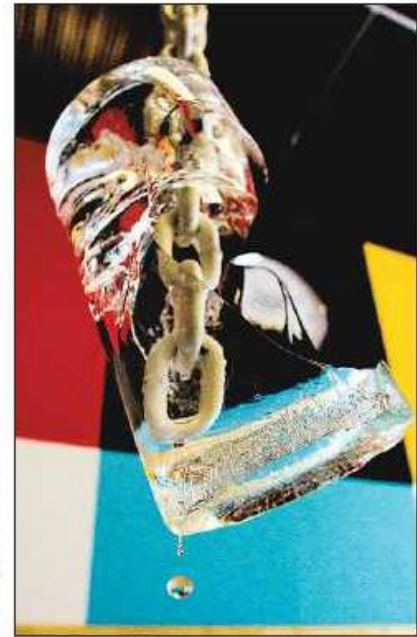
Often a subject of art, the Wa-

ter Works in recent years also has hosted artists, serving as a venue for a cantata last December and a theater performance in the summer of 2013.

Now it seems the Water Department is jumping head first into the arts-festival pool. "For the Love of Water" (FLOW, for short) launches at 1 p.m. and will feature site-specific interactive artworks and artmaking, river critters and sound contempla-

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The melting water strikes an amplified steel drum. Owen says visitors can alter the pitch by moving the drum, in essence making river music.



In "Drip Drums," by Will E. Owen, visitors can create music as ice made from river water melts onto steel drums. The festival is set for Sunday at 1 p.m. at the Fairmount Water Works. DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

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Water Works

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tion, video, textiles, and lots of splashing, culminating in a sound, word, and light show rippling across the facades of the entrance houses after sunset.

"It's exciting for us," said Karen Young, the Water Works' executive director. The river "wasn't always the most pleasant place to come, and now it is. I want people to come to the river and learn its place in history, and to learn more about the role of water in our lives."

The festival's focus is, of course, Schuylkill water. What does it sound like? What does it look like? Where does it come from? What does it conceal? What can it inspire?

Those are some of the questions Young and Victoria A. Prizzia, founder of the design firm Habithèque Inc., wrestle with as they rethink the Water Department's interpretive mission at the complex, nearing its 200th anniversary in 2015.

Prizzia has fashioned a festival that both draws from the river and directs attention back to it.

"We have a series of site-specific art installations that have been created for the festival, and they all somehow explore the inter-

section of art, science, and some technology," she said. "It is a very real way to activate the surface of the site and to use the architecture to raise awareness of what actually happens there. The site itself comes alive."

Will E. Owen, 29, an artist who often works with sound, has created two festival pieces. One, *Drip Drums*, uses ice made from river water, allowing visitors to create their own music from melt dripping onto steel drums.

"As it drips, people can interact with it by changing the pitch and moving [the drum] around and effectively making music from the Schuylkill River," Owen said the other day as he tested the piece out. "Then the water will spill out onto the ground and evaporate again."

In his second piece, *Sonic States*, Owen's field recordings sketch an aural portrait of Schuylkill life.

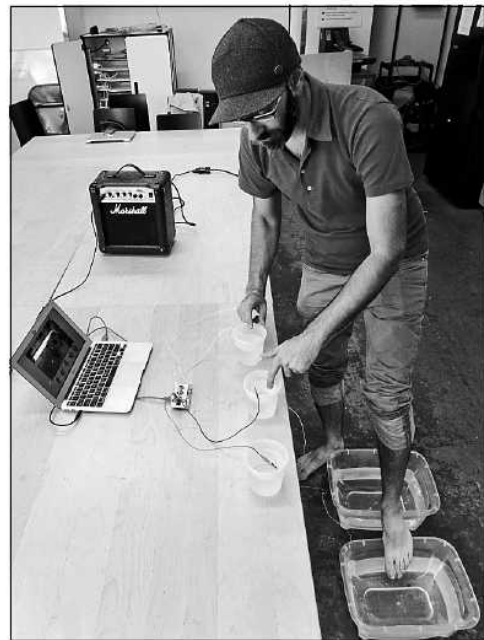
"In the morning, you get sounds of people running, riding their bikes, leaving the docks on Boathouse Row, crew teams, skateboarders, bugs," he said. "At night with less traffic it was better to get specific isolated sound, people walking and chatting. So it will be a kind of medita-

tion on how people interact with the river, what it means for everybody to have a social space."

Lee Tusman, 32, who helped curate the festival, is creating *Splash Organ* — bins of water subjected to extremely low-voltage electrical current and connected to recorded sounds of bells, chimes, gongs, and water flowing over the Schuylkill dam. When visitors place a hand or foot in the water, they complete an electrical circuit and create a sound.

"Anything can be art," said Tusman, barefoot and wet, testing the organ. "More importantly, is it interesting? This is a piece that's participatory. It allows people to use water to create music. ... You can make a mess and become a part of the instrument itself. You actually help make the instrument occur. So instead of listening to sounds of water like in Will Owen's piece, the water itself is part of the instrument."

Sam Wittchen and Alex Gilliam of Public Workshop will deploy big rain-drop-shape cutouts for visitors to use in building large structures. "This gets people more invested in a place," Gilliam said. "It gives them ownership of it. It allows them to start noticing things about architecture, about environment." The two say the



"Anything can be art," says Lee Tusman, a festival curator. In his "Splash Organ," when visitors put a hand or foot in water, they create a sound. DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

resulting large interlocking pieces will amount to "a billboard" for the Water Works, viewable from the other side of the river.

The festival will conclude with the extravagant *States of the Schuylkill River*, featuring the poem "Rising" by Beth Kephart, from her book *Flow*. Words and watery river im-

ages will stream across the facade of the large entrance building while sound wraps the entire Water Works.

Said Karen Young, "We're going to show the power of water."

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