Music meets science in a new way of hearing

BRIDGET CORMACK

WHEN Erik Griswold uses everyday items such as roof tiles or ceramic bowls to make music, he invites audiences to hear the world in a new way. It’s an innovative approach to music-making and one he believes could put his ensemble in a similar category to the work of scientists.

“We’re both involved in the same thing of exploring the world,” says Griswold, who with Vanessa Tomlinson comprises experimental Brisbane art-music duo Clocked Out. “Art and science help us think about the world in a new way.”

The two, who have built a reputation for creating music from discarded items, is changing the way it operates because it wants more freedom to experiment. Tomlinson says they recently decided not to apply for annual state government organisational funding because such pressures make it harder to create “radical” art.

“It could be suicidal,” Tomlinson says. “(But) we will be spending heaps more time in the studio than on the computer doing administration.”

For the past five years Clocked Out has received between $50,000 and $70,000 annually from Arts Queensland. But Tomlinson says administrative requirements in the grant — forward planning and detailing how the organisation was growing or improving — had made the process of making art more difficult.

“We need long service leave from running a small to medium organisation and the responsibilities of governance and administrative accountability that go with that,” she says.

Applicants for annual small to medium-organisation funding must show good governance and set out program and budget details for the forthcoming year. Arts Queensland also expects successful applicants to show “continuous improvement” and may look to evidence of audience growth and public demand when deciding applications.

“Because of the pressure to make sure you are maintaining a high level of audience numbers, some of our more experimental esoteric ideas don’t get fleshed out quite as much,” Tomlinson says. “Administrative art funding requires you to understand what it is you want to do and we like to spend as much time as possible in that research area of not knowing.”

Clocked Out is concentrating on securing one-off project-based funding grants and is approaching private donors, venues and festivals for support.

The duo has organised a mini-festival next month at the Queensland Conservatorium, the Trilling Wire, where it will perform Time Crystals. Featuring percussion and prepared piano, the work takes its cues from Nobel-prize winning theoretical physicist Frank Wilczek.

“We’re taking the idea of crystal shapes, angles and lattice structures that we can visualise and transferring that to sound design,” Griswold says. “What’s important to me is not duplicating the mathematical structure but trying to capture the idea of the time crystals in sound.”

Vanessa Tomlinson and Erik Griswold