



PANDORA'S JUKEBOX

Bessie Wapp



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Exhibition Title

Pandora's Jukebox

Artist

Bessie Wapp

Exhibition & Residency Coordinator

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Exhibition Essay

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Bessie Wapp, *Pandora's Jukebox*, collage, 2021

Oxygen Art Centre

Based in Nelson BC, Oxygen Art Centre is a rural artist-run centre that provides space and programming for artists and the public to engage in the creation, study, exhibition, and performance of contemporary art. Founded in 2002, Oxygen is an integral and long-standing cultural hub for artists of all disciplines. Oxygen's annual programming includes an Exhibition & Residency program and Education program, as well as events, presentations, readings, and workshops.

Acknowledgments and Gratitude

Oxygen Art Centre acknowledges with gratitude that we are located on the tum xula7xw / traditional territory of the s̓n̓s̓ay̓ckstx / the Sinixt People. As uninvited guests we honour their ongoing presence on this land. We recognize that the Sinixt Arrow Lakes, Sylix, and Yaqaṇ Nukij Lower Kootenay Band peoples are also connected with this land, as are Métis and many diverse Indigenous persons.

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We especially thank all of our volunteers, donors, and members.



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Opening Song

Hello, my fellow travelers!
You are looking fine today.
Your earth-suits are most handsome,
No obvious tears or frays.
If only human insides
Were as tidy, clean, and spare.
But we are messy, murky, fickle things
With sad, mad burdens to bear.

And that is why we're gathered here,
We've been called to listen deeply
To an ancient myth that needs rewriting,
Reimagining completely.
Your help is essential for the task,
Your heart, your ears, your voices.
To transform these terrible burdens,
The result of innocent choices.

Now, of course, change isn't easy
The voice of doubt will likely wail
"It'll say it's all for naught.. You've lost the plot"
And my favourite: "You'll probably fail."
But the danger's only in our minds.
And we're all in it together.
But what is this "it" we're together in?
This thing... this endeavor?

A journey. An experience.
A gathering. A circle.
A myth reborn. A chrysalis.
An apocalypse. A miracle.
A catastrophic sing-a-long,
A consolation for our times.
A hymn for minds and hearts,
Of mangled melody and rhyme.

Bring all your tears, your fears, your wants,
Your greatest loves and losses.
We will call into the dark
Our souls will answer at the crossroads.
For every sin and sweet salvation
There's a yodel, moan, or doowop.
The time draws near.
So glad you're here.
Welcome to Pandora's Jukebox!

Exhibition Essay

by Allison Girvan

What is the power of a storyteller? What happens when a story is told through a new lens? In these uncertain times, can artists help restore hope and unity to invest in the future? How does one connect on an intimate level to nurture trust and vulnerability during a pandemic, and most of all, over Zoom?!

These are questions multi-disciplinary artist, Bessie Wapp, explores in *Pandora's Jukebox*—a retelling of the myth of Pandora whose curiosity results in the unleashing of all humanity's evils.

Created to punish man after Prometheus stole the gift of fire and gave it to them against Zeus' will, Pandora is sent as a "beautiful evil" from whose lineage men will endlessly suffer. Pandora arrives with a box that she is told never to open. However, Pandora succumbs to her curiosity—a trait attributed to her innately "problematic" feminine nature—and opens the box. Greed, envy, hatred, pain, disease, hunger, poverty, war, and death flood out. Pandora slams the lid shut, but by then, the only thing remaining in the box left to preserve is hope.

Myself and a group of participants are introduced to broad strokes of the familiar myth through an online participatory performance with Wapp as our raconteur. Our storyteller-guide sings us a song inviting us to "bring all your tears, your fears, your wants, your greatest loves and losses," and we are off.

A video tour through Oxygen Art Centre's space reveals a sequence of tables atop which red boxes are placed. Each contains an item designed to provoke our own curiosity: an iPhone, a bra, bullets. The camera advances to a circular configuration of chairs which we Zoomers recognize as ours to have occupied in a parallel, non-Covid universe.

On one of the chairs sits a plate of food, an offering for her ancestors. As the disembodied audience participating in the ritual remotely, one could forgive the conceit that we were, in fact, the intended recipients of this symbolic repast. This parallel was the first of several realizations of the unexpected boons hiding in online artistic formats.

We gather around a centerpiece, an enchanting poppy pod starburst, which is lit from above to project a larger shadow-image of itself on the floor below.

And so, the spell is cast. We are pulled into the tale as the computer screen transforms into a portal through which we immerse ourselves in an altered tale. Here our curiosity is rewarded as we become active participants in the shared narrative.

The encouragement to participate takes shape in a request for each of the online participants to write down something that brings us peace, gives us strength, and brings us joy. To this list, we are to also add something that burdens us. We then enter our responses anonymously into a Google document. This action illustrates another moment of grace in the necessity to employ technology to replace in-person experiences. The impediment of physical distance from our host is mitigated by the loss of self-consciousness in

expressing intimate thoughts from the safety of our own homes. Even though we don't know whose words we are seeing, we can read each other's anonymous input. Participation quickly develops a bond between the assembled strangers who have made themselves vulnerable in the sharing of touching and miniature insights into their lives.

Bessie thanks us for our contributions and continues the tale. We are drawn further into her words as an ostinato of a synthesized lyre seamlessly weaves itself into the story. This repeated loop becomes the foundation for a song sung by Epimetheus whose anguished melodies articulate the worries and fears of the world drawn from our collective Google doc list. One by one, we hear our contributions sung by Epimetheus, through Bessie. We are reminded in this moment of the power and validation in hearing our personal concerns reflected in another's voice.

Poppy seeds become metaphors for hope, action, and transformation that propel the story. Pandora and her "Jukebox" are the instruments of change for Zeus who, in true Greek-god fashion, exhibits some very human characteristics in a moment of catharsis and redemption. He summons memories of happy moments in a song that Bessie stitches together using the fabric of our recollections of what brings us peace, strength, and joy.

What is the power of a storyteller and is it possible to connect in an intimate and profound way over Zoom? Bessie proves that an expert and engaging storyteller who can model vulnerability to gently encourage others to engage similarly holds the power to construct community among those gathered.

As for how we as artists can help to restore hope and unity in order for it to feel possible to invest in our future, well, experiencing *Pandora's Jukebox* reminds me of the word "move," in the context of witnessing art.

There is great potential for us to feel "moved" when attending a performance or event. At the end of these moving experiences, the spillover is tangible—we bring that energy out into the world. In choosing thematic material for composition and storytelling, artistic experiences can guide that energy and hold the possibility for direct movement or change.

By reframing curiosity, employing themes of empathy and redemption in order to spark hope, and allowing us a window into our shared sorrows and joys through collaborative process, Bessie has lightened the collective burden of division that is currently a twin disease to that of Covid-19.

In this time of pandemic, Bessie moves us to reevaluate the quality of the prefix "pan-". She invites us to remember its meaning: "all" within a pan-disciplinary, pan-format work. And, as such it is possible to remind ourselves that something which is seemingly sent to divide us can be an opportunity to kindle empathy and bring us together.

Pandora. All gifts.

Pandora's Jukebox performance documentation, Thomas Nowaczynski, 2022

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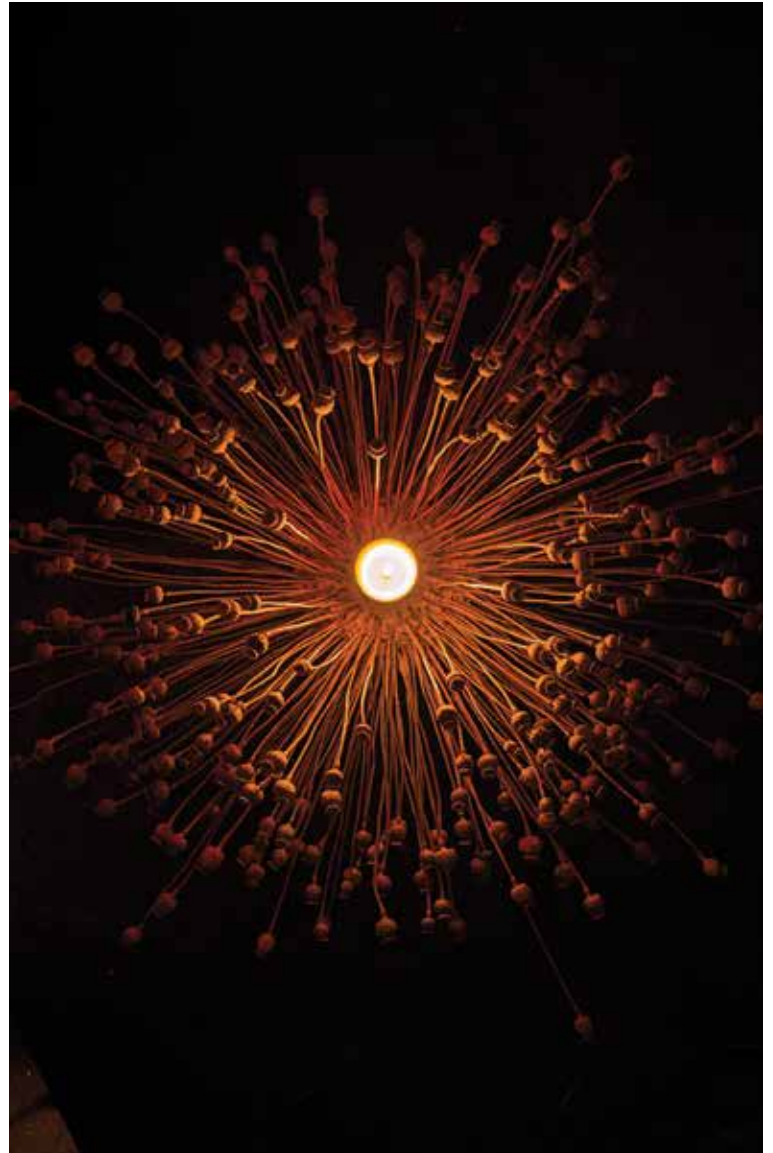


























Artist Biography

Bessie Wapp was born in New York City and raised in the Kootenays. She is a musician, theatre-maker and educator. Wapp's music practice involves voice, accordion, hand percussion and piano. She has performed in Europe and throughout North America. Touring highlights include Festival D'ete (Montreal), Lincoln Centre (NYC) and Zagreb Dance Week (Croatia). She has studied the arts at Emily Carr College of Art And Design, Vancouver Community College and Selkirk College's Contemporary Music Program. While living in Vancouver, she worked with innovation and multi-disciplinary theatre groups such as Public Dreams, Electric Company, Radix, Ruby Slippers, Touchstones, Vancouver Moving Centre and Gamelan Madu Sari. In 2006, she relocated to Nelson where she co-founded Twin Fish Theatre. Through this company she began to develop an autobiographical body of work sourcing material and stories from her ancestry and family life. *This little Piggie, Hello, I must be going, Loco Phantasma* and *Letters from Lithuania* are part of this series. She has cultivated music projects including *Klezmeridian*, *Bessie and the Black Eddies* and *Oxygen Orkestar*. Wapp has performed in festivals and theatre productions throughout British Columbia. Her interest in expressive arts programs, arts education and community-engaged projects has brought her in to creative and often collaborative contact with people of all ages. Wapp teaches for the Oxygen Art Centre and heads up the Blue House Choir. In 2015 Wapp was named Nelson's Cultural Ambassador.

Closing Song

Thank you, fellow travelers!
For being here today.
For playing along and listening
To all we needed to say.
I hope your heart feels lighter
And your mind a little clearer.
And your spirit buoyed for the next big batch
Of incoming emotional weather.

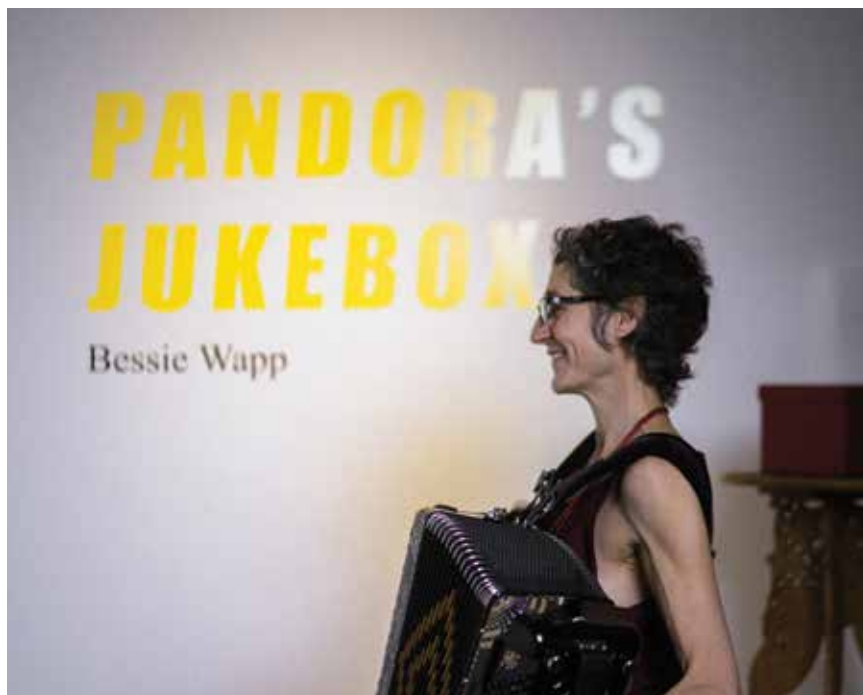
(Big feelings will come, big feelings will pass
In this being human task.
We're up, we're down, or leaning sideways
It's really a lot to ask,
That we all keep on an even keel
In so many different ways.
I say each one of us is a hero
If we only commit manslaughter every other day.)

A journey. An experience.
A gathering. A circle.
A myth reborn. A chrysalis.
An apocalypse. A miracle.
A catastrophic sing-a-long,
A consolation for our times.
A hymn for minds and hearts,
Of mangled melody and rhyme.

We shared our tears, our fears, our wants,
our greatest loves and losses.
We called into the dark
Our souls were waiting at the crossroads.
And every sin and sweet salvation
Gave a yodel, moan, or doowop.
We've reached the end
Thanks you so much, friends.
I hope we sing
Together again.
Antios sas* from me, (*αντιο σας)
That's goodbye in Greek,
Lots of love from Pandora's Jukebox!

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