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## Interview with Shaun Tai Director of the Oakland Digital Arts & Literacy

November 27th, 2009 by saiofrelief

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**Please introduce yourself and your organization to the readers of saiofrelief.com.**

First, I want to begin by giving a shout-out to everyone reading this right now. 2009 has been a rough year for the country (especially individuals in the Bay Area); I know a lot of people are struggling through this ridiculous and very real economic drought. I also know 2010 will bring brighter and better things. My name is Shaun Tai, but I've had a number of aliases over the years. The music / entertainment industry knows me as "Emcee T" - I believe as we grow in this thing labeled 'life', we evolve and change for the better, and for the right reasons. Earlier this year, I founded the non-profit organization, Oakland Digital Arts & Literacy Center (ODALC).

**Can you please give readers some insight personal and professional background?**

Sure. As a person, I'm a firm believer that every year we should aim to out-do the previous year – not necessarily financially, but mentally and by positive action. That's how I continue to live... I'm proud to have received my BA at Cal State Hayward (now known as Cal State East Bay) and a BS along with a Masters degree from San Jose State University. Professionally, I've worked at a number of design firms and currently I'm the principal of a full range multimedia firm (ZTY MEDIA) with clients such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

**You've previously worked in music and film what made you want to enter the nonprofit social services sector.**

I'm Bay Area born and raised. Bay Area rap was a huge influence, musically, to my upbringing. Long story short, I love the Bay – the culture, the people, the food, and the diversity. Film and videography to me, is allowing others to see through your eyes, piggy backing off your vision. I've always been about telling a story – helping people learn, become inspired and want to do better for themselves. Even with Pushin' The Bay (PTBTV), I made a conscious effort to reach out to organizations such as Toys for Toys, Habitat for Humanity and a number of Bay Area homegrown non-profits. My PTBTV partner Ray Luv often speaks at juvenile facilities and participates in numerous charitable events internationally. What pushed me to enter the sector were actually people around me believing and seeing my enthusiasm towards "giving back."

**Can you define the term "digital arts" for our readers who aren't familiar with the idea? Also, please explain why you chose this particular medium to offer to the traditionally underserved and underrepresented.**

The question isn't "what is digital art?"; the question is "what ISN'T digital art?". Literally, everything around us in any environment utilizes a computer and/or digital technology in its creation. A good example is the process of making a billboard – a group of creative's got together to come up with the idea / exchanged notes via email/computer, graphic design was utilized to come up with the rough and final, the photographer was using a digital camera to take the image(s), a digital printer was used as its final output, etc. Point being, digital arts is an important and integral part of business in this day and age. Unfortunately, a majority of the youth and young adults use the "digital arts" for the wrong reasons, or might only use it to socialize. I want to inspire young adults of all

background... I want them to learn something practical, something new that can actually help... To me, inspiration and providing practical digital tools that will increase productivity (and help with getting a 'better' job) will be the only way!

**What made you and your staff choose the city of Oakland as the home of this endeavor?**

I love Oakland. My family business has been in Oakland for over 40 years. We've seen the ups and downs, mainly downs. There was a riot four blocks away from the store after the unfortunate Oscar Grant incident. After it happened, I asked an 18-year old, "What would get people off the street?" – His reply, "Activities man, just something to do that would help us move up." That's when I realized the potential of the ODALC. And besides, why NOT Oakland? The ODALC sees opportunity and the untapped genius currently hidden in the City of Oakland.

**What type of services will you provide to the city of Oakland's residents?**

The Oakland Digital Arts & Literacy Center (ODALC) is a source of **Inspiration**. We offer **Innovative Computer Training** and **Access to technology** and **keynotes speakers from all over the world**.

**You will be offering a number of courses such as "The Music Business" and "Business Computing Skills". Do you think community members will be able to benefit from being in the classroom setting?**

Those are just a few courses that we will offer. And yes, community members will benefit. Why? The way we "teach" is practical, innovative, and done so with integrity. ODALC combines working professionals, and the brightest minds in the Bay Area all together, all in one central spot, Oakland – we want to treat the community of Oakland with respect, and only bring the finest that Silicon Valley has to offer to come teach. We go miles beyond, "Hey! Here is a computer, learn."

**What type of impact in the lives of those who receive these services are you looking to have?**

A major impact. The way we believe and the amount of knowledge we (as a collective) have learned, I want people to believe in Oakland and its diverse community – it's sad, but very few people in the community have up-close-and-personal access to key figures in the Silicon Valley or the company behind their favorite website or social media platform. Here is our chance to make real change; not only for the underserved, but small business owners, working professional and even disabled persons. No group or person is excluded.

**What is your target population and why?**

18-35 year olds consisting of young professionals, high school drop-outs, college drop-outs, the have-nots, etc. Why? That is the population that our board can reach and make the strongest impact; it's often the group that is left out (i.e. kids and elders are the usual groups targeted). I feel that the 18-35 bracket is the group that could possibly get into the most trouble... and I refuse to give up! That being said, we have already connected with a number of other groups interested in our services including war veterans to victims of domestic abuse.

**What impact are you looking to have on not just the community but the city of Oakland and greater bay area?**

We envision Oakland to be one of the forefronts of technology and educational innovation. ODALC hopes that other cities will follow our original format – most important, we want to showcase the talent and bright minds that Oakland has to the world!

**How does ODALC your current endeavor differ from previous works i.e. Pushin' The Bay (TV / Radio) and being a recording artist?**

ODALC was created by members of the community; purely for the community. No individual is more important than the community participant / member. I will always continue to "push the bay" and I'll always record music for fun... but the ODALC is selfless and for a great social cause. The love for helping, teaching and inspiring the community is my main purpose and only goal. Most important, I believe the ODALC can positively change lives.

**When did you decide to start the ODALC and who did you work collaboratively with?**

[http://www.odalc.org/press/ODALC\\_111609\\_Article.pdf](http://www.odalc.org/press/ODALC_111609_Article.pdf) - is a link to an article/story with the background, history and key figures involved with the creation of ODALC. I'm truly thankful for everyone's support and hard work.

**Where do you see the ODALC in the next 5-10 years?**

I see the ODALC being a proven (computer) training ground and major source of inspiration for young people and professionals in Oakland. I see people of all backgrounds coming to the ODALC to build computer skills and network with working professionals. I also see the ODALC situated in its own building complete with an auditorium for speakers, and facilities for the digital arts (i.e. state-of-the-art computer lab, recording studio, video room, etc.). I see the ODALC creating opportunities and giving 'lost ones' hope, encouragement and a solid foundation.

## Do you anticipate that the leaders of Silicon Valley will respond to your call for participation?

With hard work, anything is possible. There is no such thing as a hand out – I truly believe that once the ball gets rolling, and people see the hard work and persistence, leaders of Silicon Valley will see the tremendous upside and benefit of the ODALC. Sure, there will be skeptics and sure, to get off the ground it will be a long, rough journey... The ODALC is for real; and the ODALC is here to stay. We welcome any and all participation from Silicon Valley leaders.

## How can readers who are interested in donating and volunteering contact the organization?

The ODALC needs your support. If you believe in making a real change in the Bay Area and want to be part of something great, please contact us. Your donation doesn't have to be monetary, we need volunteers and talent. Whether you want to teach a class, donate your old computer(s), or have a building we can call our home, let's start the conversation and work together!

You can check out our website at [www.odalc.org](http://www.odalc.org) and for the latest developments and news, you can visit our blog at [www.inspireoakland.com](http://www.inspireoakland.com). If you want to chat and find out more, contact me directly at (925) 297-9370.

Keep pushin', stay positive, peace and Bay Love

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oakland digital arts & literacy center | ODALC: Inspire, Train, and Innovate.

November 28th, 2009 at 11:53 am



[...] Exclusive interview with Shaun Tai Director of the Oakland Digital Arts & Literacy Center at Saiofrelief.com. [...]

Sones De Mexico Ensemble Chosen to Represent U.s. at the 2008 World Folk

November 28th, 2009 at 5:53 pm



[...] Interview with Shaun Tai Director of the Oakland Digital Arts ... [...]

Ivan writes:

November 29th, 2009 at 2:16 am



Everything dynamic and very positively! 😊  
Ivan

Donnie Evertsen writes:

December 18th, 2009 at 9:07 pm



Great post. I learned some very useful information from it. I have been struggling with an addiction myself for most of my life, so what you wrote really meant a lot to me. Visit my blog if you'd like to read more. Thanks again for this blog - it is really educational.

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