

# Entering

1974, Colour, 8 minutes, 2" original master, PAL

**Music composed and performed by Simon Desorgher**

Entering is a classic videotape, representing something of a milestone in British broadcasting and art history. It was the first independent "art" videotape and the first completely abstract work to be commissioned and broadcast nationally on television in the UK - in May 1974 in an Arts magazine programme hosted by Melvyn Bragg. The Arts Council of Great Britain was also supporting Donebauer's work at this time.

It was recorded by the BBC as an outside broadcast from the Royal College of Art television studio in Kensington, London on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1974. Pictures and sound were transmitted via a microwave link to the Television Centre at White City via the Crystal Palace transmitter on the other side of London (as no direct line of site was available between the two sites just two miles apart!)

The imagery and sound were performed and recorded by Donebauer and Desorgher "playing" together in real time with both participants having visual and aural feedback of each other's transforming contributions as they affected the piece in real time and thus in turn their own continuing contributions. The tape represents the best early example of the visual techniques developed by Donebauer, who had access to the old ATV colour studio donated to the College by Lew Grade. Donebauer's techniques involved manipulating the studio in ways for which it was never designed to explore the potential for a form of "Electronic Painting" equivalent to the "Electronic Music" that was being first developed around that time. Donebauer and Desorgher worked together for several years with Desorgher providing and co-ordinating the sound elements through a mixture of traditional musical instruments and electronics.

The imagery is non-representational, and the tape's theme is an allegory of the experience of birth in the physical sense and re-birth in the metaphysical sense. The tape's structure is in three sections separated by moments of darkness. The first section suggests the security of a womb. The second section develops through a series of contractions leading to the expansion of birth itself. The final section suggests the quiescence of rest and sleep.

## **Content and Form**

### **In Donebauer's video productions**

**Performance** - All Donebauer and Desorgher's videos from the Seventies involve a complex real-time performance between one or more electronic visual artist(s) and one or more musician(s) and electronic performer(s). Each had visual and aural feedback of one another's output in real time and the visual element thus became an equivalent to the production of live music. The recordings saved were the best "take" achieved during the typically three-day set-up and recording schedule. This placed the resulting video in a completely different "space" artistically to that occupied by other people working with video in the UK at that time, perhaps having more in common with a few practitioners in the USA who were similarly trying to explore the achievable visual boundaries of this new medium. In 1978 Donebauer founded a travelling performance group called VAMP (for Video and Music Performers), but despite sell-out shows at the ICA, Birmingham Arts Lab etc it could not continue due to lack of funding.

**Abstraction and the visual equivalence to music** - Donebauer felt that the visual element was an "equivalent" to music, which traditionally is an "abstract" art form created independently of naturally occurring sounds in the environment. He therefore worked with abstract imagery and found precursors to his forms in the works of the abstract artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (notably Kandinsky and Pollock), and abstract film-makers in the USA (notably Jordan Belson)

**Improvisation** is a key aspect of Donebauer (and Desorgher's) work, and was given much consideration. This is not surprising given his perception of the potential equivalence of the video medium to music making. The Seventies was also characterised by the emergence of "performance art". All these influences, plus the technical difficulty of editing video with any subtlety in those early days of the medium, combined to result in an aesthetic based around simultaneous live performance of sound and visual production and an unedited recording. Virtue was made out of the difficulties – because of technical complexity and consequent limitations on detailed visual control, it was natural for these performances to develop strong elements of improvisation. Each video would be based on a theme, usually a process, and the improvisation would be based around an agreed structure in time for the various visual and sound elements selected. Even later, when the visual control developed greater sophistication through familiarity and devices such as the Videokalos image processor, the improvisation was retained as a key structural component.

**Fractals, Feedback and Natural Processes** – Donebauer’s video work always explored the interpenetration of order and chaos in the natural world. Long before the fractal mathematicians he could see that order and chaos were aspects of many, perhaps all, natural processes in the physical world, and that they mutually co-existed at different scales or at different times in these processes.

These insights were derived from his early exploration of the phenomenon of video feedback, of which he probably became the world’s leading exponent during the Seventies. (Video feedback is now recognised as a “classic” fractal phenomenon.) The complexity and instability of video feedback requires a particular approach when its use is attempted in a performance situation as it can be present one instant and gone the next! Despite these practical difficulties, feedback has remained a constant component from his first videos to his latest – it often just gets used very subtly. This consistent use is because it adds a “naturalistic complexity” to simpler forms, which thereby reflect those found in nature. Indeed Donebauer consistently describes his videos as expressing fundamentally natural forms, and this riddle was only really explained through the eventual work of some pioneering mathematicians in the Eighties. Essentially, fractal mathematics describes the complex processes that define what makes the natural world look natural!

**Videokalos Synthesiser** – Working with access to a broadcast colour television studio at the Royal College of Art stimulated Donebauer’s unique exploration of the visual potential of the video medium. But all the complex technology of such a studio was designed to produce accurate naturalistic reproduction of scenes with some small degree of variance of the lighting conditions. This was a broadcast TV media aim rather than an artistic one. By playing with and deliberately mis-aligning the various controls, interesting visual possibilities and colour control were possible. Given that access to such a studio for this kind of purpose was highly unusual for an individual, as well as expensive, Donebauer conceived of bringing the most useful aspects of the studio into a single portable device that could be used independently with less expensive monochrome cameras and more modest supporting equipment. A chance encounter with electronic designer, Richard Monkhouse, led to a two year collaboration that resulted in the Videokalos synthesiser, or more accurately a complex image processing device. Following commercial development several were sold at that time to colleges etc, and it became a central part of Donebauer’s repertoire of techniques. He paralleled his construction of this complex device as equivalent to classical painters mixing their own pigments from natural source materials. And it gave him significant insights into the fundamental nature of the video medium.

Peter Donebauer -see [www.donebauer.net](http://www.donebauer.net)

Donebauer pioneered an exploration of colour video within the context of a strong metaphysical focus. He designed/built a synthesiser that became central to his practice, working closely with musicians in performance situations, and was the first artist to have a video commissioned for UK national broadcast ("*Entering*", BBC2, 1974).