

VAMP at Tate Britain (on Millbank) 2006

Friday 1st December 20.00- 20.45

VAMP - the **V**ideo **A**nd **M**usic **P**erformers - were formed in the late Seventies and the core consisted of **Peter Donebauer** and **Richard Monkhouse** (video) with **Simon Desorgher** and **Lawrence Casserley** (audio). This was a development from Peter and Simon working together for several years producing recorded videotape pieces in studio situations. VAMP believe they were the first group in the world to perform integrated video and audio in a touring situation back in 1978, and that potential resulted from the construction of the **Videokalos** image processing synthesiser that Peter had designed and built in collaboration with Richard Monkhouse in the mid-seventies. This is a retrospective performance very similar to those done at that time.

Peter had developed an aesthetic combining video and music that he saw as a progression on from earlier pioneers in the nineteenth century, who imagined colour moving in time that they called “**colour music**”. Those earliest artist/inventors built “colour organs” that projected moving abstract light onto screens. In the twentieth century the effect of projected colour was developed by abstract artists and filmmakers in Europe and the USA, and later by producers of “light-shows”, but Peter felt video really made possible for the first time the creation or performance of controlled moving colour in real time, equivalent to music.

So, in essence, the video players here act as members of a music group, but produce and mix imagery instead of sound. Both visual and audio performers hear and see ones another’s real-time outputs and interact accordingly. This differed radically from existing light shows, as with VAMP the vision and sound had equal musical/artistic equivalence and interaction in real-time performance, and neither necessarily leads or illustrates the other. Such an interaction became possible because of the visual instruments built by Peter and Richard, see below, and pre-dated the development of VJ’s with their digital equipment by some 10 or more years.

There are no electrical or programmed links between the sound and vision as one often gets with automated computer programs that throw up imagery to follow the sound being input. The links are in the psyches of the performers and meaning is created there and in their mutual interactions, directly equivalent to a group of musicians playing together. The performance is a “structured improvisation”. “Free improvisations” can work with music, but real time visual instruments, particularly vintage analogue ones, are still very recent and therefore somewhat limited compared with musical instruments with their hundreds of years of development behind them. So in practice the visual palette selected sets some initial parameters, along with a choice of a suitable “palette” of sounds and then follows an exploration/rehearsal around the mutual possibilities available. A theme and “time structure” evolves for each piece that forms the basis for a performance. We will also use some pre-recorded visuals for this show as part of the visual palette.

The performers for this event are:

Simon Desorgher on flute and electronics

Peter Donebauer on his Videokalos synthesiser with other visual inputs

Richard Monkhouse on his Quartic Vector Pattern Generator

Michael Ormiston on Mongolian horse-head fiddle with Mongolian overtone singing with thanks to Mike Ray and Andy Macrae for technical support. As the context for this performance is linked to "Analogue", an exhibition of early video, we have where possible in the context of a live performance tried to keep the creative aspects of the performance to older analogue equipment and processes rather than digital ones, resulting in a different look and feel.

The central piece that makes this performance possible is the **Videokalos Image Processing Synthesiser** conceived back in 1974 by Peter Donebauer, and designed and built as a collaboration with Richard Monkhouse over the following two years. A key technical and aesthetic issue at that time, which has equal relevance today, is the nature of the interface between the creator/performer of moving imagery and the technology. The Videokalos was designed to be used "live", in real time, by one person "playing" it, equivalent to a musical instrument. It allows an individual the control of complex visual imagery performed at the same speed as the human body and its nervous system – a revolutionary step for the production of moving images. It is an analogue device and works with both monochrome and red, green and blue video signals that it takes in and processes and combines to produce a final output. It provides the core electrical elements of a video studio in a box as well as vision mixing and colour generation and overlays - for more details see www.donebauer.net

A key visual source to the Videokalos is Richard's analogue **Quartic vector pattern generator** that he can play in real time. Generating moving line images of mathematical purity, in this performance its output is re-scanned by one or more analogue video cameras, resulting sometimes in forms and motion that point to the connection of mathematics to our natural world. The performer can manipulate forty parameters that continuously change the moving image, allowing precise real-time control. We will use some pre-recorded analogue visual sources, but digitally recorded as this makes no real difference to the viewer and they are much more stable technically in a live performance situation. Peter is also a great user of visual feedback loops; these are equivalent to the feedback between the performers themselves and they have a common basis with the "complexity" of natural processes.

This performance will also feature Simon's legendary (and unique) vintage EMS VCS4 synthesiser. Built in 1969, it has recently been overhauled by ex-EMS engineer, Robin Wood, but it is showing its age after years of active creative music-making. Essentially two VCS3s were built into a base frame and linked together with the addition of a keyboard: the base frame contained other newly created music circuits - a "random staircase generator", a "sub-harmonic generator", a small mixer with inputs for live instruments and a system to cue live instrumentalists.