

ELECTRONIC PURGATORY

A DIGITAL MUSIC-THEATRE COMPOSITION for PERFORMERS,
INTERACTIVE ELECTRONICS and ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC.

CREATED by KRISTI ALLIK and ROBERT MULDER

THE CONCEPT

Electronic Purgatory is a Digital Music-Theatre composition. Digital Music-Theatre is an emerging form of multi-disciplinary theatre in which traditional staging agents have been replaced with electroacoustic instruments and projected visuals. All these constituents are generated and/or controlled "live" by the performers (interactors) on the stage by means of an interactive multi-computer network. Consequently all elements, both visual and aural, are generated, realized and controlled in real-time without the use of video or audio tape. The interactors, interwoven in this complex interactive aural-visual fabric, take the audience on a journey through time and multiple dimensions of reality which ranges from the turbulent initiation of the Universe to a serene "quantum-physical" apotheosis.

Structurally the work is divided in five closely meshed movements. The first movement begins with a stage interpretation of a "turbulent dynamical system" (chaos) such as the singularity encountered at the initial state of the Universe. The complexity of this event is visualized by the use of two (life-size) video screens (called Video Worlds), each of which is capable of showing a slightly different dynamical system.

The almost god-like gestures of the interactors shape the primordial "soup-of-all-possibilities" into increasingly more intricate and perdurable aural and visual forms. In time, these congealing formations reveal the evolution of a familiar heavenly phenomena, namely, the solar system and the Earth. This section of the work has a Genesis-like flavour and thus probes the development of the entropy-defying force of life (*Alpha*). However, in time, the physical actions of the interactors become more self-directed and less environmentally oriented. This results in the gradual dissolution of the delicate interdependent layers between humanity and *Alpha*, which eventually leads to the mechanistic, B.F. Skinner-inspired reality of *Purgatory*.

This movement (*Purgatory*) deals with the basic contradictions associated with the state of human awareness: it is a place where the human spirit is separated from the body, and tortured in a "mindscape" sired by its own intellect (*Inferno*), while the corporeal remains

are chained to a landscape wrought by the body's own hands (*Purgatory*).

In the last movement (*Paradise*) a balance is stuck in a final resolve between the metaphysical and the "quantum-physical" forces. Here the cycle completes itself with an exploration into the dynamics of parallel relationships encountered in multiple layers of reality as described by both *Dante Alighieri* (poet) and *Stephen Hawking* (physicist).

THE STAGING

Much of the "outer-worldly" quality in the work is achieved with its corresponding unique staging design. During the whole piece the interactors are confined to a relatively small stage area. This area is completely devoid of any set-like contraptions. A light-absorbing black floor and a black velvet backdrop will make the stage appear even more empty and dark.

On stage the interactors move in a very slow and deliberate manner. Their white clothing becomes a canvass for the projections of bold graphic design and richly coloured textures. The true magic of the piece is achieved by placing the interactors electronically within the two fantastic video-landscapes. With exploratory movements they appear to shape and initiate a multitude of aural and visual phenomena. The "cybernetic choreography" encompasses all levels and elements in the piece; often objects or events that are created or disturbed in one Video World will immediately affect elements in the other world.

Certain sections of *Electronic Purgatory* utilize the performers merely as "movement generators", and do not show the performers themselves, only the abstracted residue of their kinetic actions. Other sections utilize the physical outline of the body of the performer as a collage tool, replacing the computer generated body outline with a "living" textural pattern.

Essentially the work is a live performance, and has sections which allow a certain amount of freedom, these sections will be uniquely different in each performance. Other sections are tightly composed, and serve as counterpoint to the improvised variations.

PHYSICAL STAGING REQUIREMENTS

The physical staging of the piece is extremely flexible. Several possible configurations are explored in the enclosed staging illustrations, all of which are variations on the complete staging configuration on page AA (Staging). Technically *Electronic Purgatory* can be customized to a multitude of configurations, some small, others very large:

* The largest configuration would utilize the full eight track sound system, two Video Worlds (images created on life-size video screens) and the two "Still Worlds" (images created by means of multi-image projection). Screen configuration 3 (page DD), illustrates this particular configuration, which is the ideal model for the staging of the work, resulting in a massive surround-sound and having a panoramic screen/stage layout which is 70 feet wide.

* Screen configuration 1 (page BB), shows a simplified staging layout with one video screen and one still image screen.

* Screen configuration 2 (page CC) shows a staging configuration of the complete visual set, but is modified to accommodate a limited stage width, which requires the unique under/over screen lay-out.

* The smallest staging configuration, not illustrated, would use a stereo sound system and a single screen.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

To achieve a true interactive and integrated performance, the artists designed and consequently accumulated a multi-computer network based on *Amiga* computers. Each computer in the network is assigned a specific task; for example each independent Video World is controlled by an independent computer. A MIDI port connects each Video World to the network, and via this network controls perimeters and timing functions in the other computers.

The completed full scale work has two independent Video Worlds, eight-channel sound generation capabilities, and two Still Worlds, all controlled by three *Amiga* computers (please see page XX (Function Diagram) in this brochure for interconnecting and software information).

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ARTISTS

KRISTI A. ALLIK was born in Toronto. She has received degrees from the University of Southern California, Princeton University and the University of Toronto. Her teachers include John Weinzwieg, James Hopkins, Frederick Leseman, Lothar Klein, Oskar Morawetz and Milton Babbitt. She received numerous commissions, and awards including Canada Council grants, Ontario Arts Council grants, a SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, a Chalmers Foundation Award, the Federation of University Woman Award and the Irving G. Mills Award. She has had performances of her works in Europe, USA and Canada.

As a composer, Allik has always been fascinated with unusual sounds. She became interested in electroacoustic music several years ago and, since that time, much of her work has dealt with electroacoustic sound and its various timbral possibilities. Allik is also interested in combining music with other artistic media. She has written an opera, been involved with theatrical productions, and has written a number of integrated media works. Above all, she is interested in increasing general awareness with her art.

Currently, Allik is on Faculty at Queen's University School of Music where she teaches composition, computer music and music theory.

ROBERT C. F. MULDER was born in Den Haag, Holland in 1943. Essentially he considered himself an electronic artist at the tender age of 14 and since that time has followed a path of self-guided education and discovery. Currently his interest are in the field of time-dependent visual phenomena, and the applications which utilize visual art as a process, rather than an object. In general he is fascinated with all matter of interactivity found between image, movement and music.

Mulder is equipped with a strong artistic as well as technical background, and this unusual facility has brought his current work to the forefront of the international exploratory arts. He has won numerous Grants and Awards, in national and international competitions. Mulder engages in concerts/lectures world-wide and his performances and installations have been seen by audiences throughout Canada, the USA and Europe. Currently he lives in Kingston, Ontario, where he operates the LumiArt audio-visual laboratory.

PROGRAM NOTES

* **CHAOS:** The first movement of *Electronic Purgatory* deals with the relationship between physical and metaphysical states encountered in the creation of multiple dimensions. Within a complex "chaotic" (applications of chaos theory) aural and visual texture the performers (interactors) are simultaneously forged and forging their environment. They are immersed in the primal inchoate of super-saturated possibilities, a locus where one touch of the finger can initiate the creation of many uncharted dimensions. During this forming process the dynamic systems are sublimated into a physical form where energy and matter become an interdependent whole; the organic dynamic system of *Alpha*.

* **ALPHA:** This movement is a catharsis of the infinite possibilities created in the first section. During the quiet coalescing of the spent energies, layers upon layers of interdependence are developed, which ultimately results in the formation of life as an entropy defeating force. The spirit of ecological consciousness and super-connectedness prevails in this fragile world. However, in time, the focus of the interactors, now in their human shape, becomes narrower, and the delicate interdependent layers of *Alpha* are dismantled and discarded; complexity is overshadowed by singularity and eventually replaced with the stark realism of the next movement: the present.

* **PURGATORY:** The third movement is a raucous journey into physical reality; it immerses the performers in a mundane, repetitive and mechanistic world. A dominating, almost Pavlovian landscape entices the inhabitants into rituals of increasing mindlessness. Placed between the ever numbing self-gratification and the insurmountable disarray of their physical and spiritual world, they willingly enter the gate to a self-induced chastisement.

* **INFERNO:** This movement portrays a world in ataxia. The performer is stripped of all corporeal attributes and placed in a mono-dimensional world where events are expressed in purely physical terms. Here, surrounded by a perdition of great visual and auditory intensity is a world without hope, reason or future. The staging is decidedly ragged and, non-contemporaneous. The dramatic events are underscored with flashes of color and percussive, discordant music. The inhabitants of this domain are swept about by the ferocious forces of an oppressive environment.

* **PARADISE:** The final movement is ethereal and brims with glowing energies of an increasingly clearer and luminous character. The scene is a peregrination in the pluralistic universe, where gestural variations of the performers can be reflected in multiple levels of parallel realities. Here the performers are immersed in a universe of inter-dependent possibilities which allows them to manipulate whichever plane of reality presents itself.

PRESS OPINIONS

Electronic Purgatory, a 20th-century version of Dante's *Inferno* created by Canadians Kristi Allik and media artist Robert Mulder, offered live interaction with computer programmed technicolor images and sounds, managing to prove man-machine interface can be poetically moving.

(Max Stern, Jerusalem Post, October 1990)

Electronic Purgatory was created with the generous assistance of:

3M Canada, London, Canada.

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VIDEO TAPE

The enclosed video tape contains a specific performance of the work. (Oslo, 1990). All elements recorded here were created or controlled from the stage, no video tape, video disks or audio tape was used. This complete performance master was not edited.

TIME:	FORMAT:	DESCRIPTION:
0.00.00	VHS NTSC	NTSC 75% colourbars.
0.00.27	VHS NTSC	Brief explanation regarding the staging of the work.
0.01.33	VHS NTSC	Simulation of four <i>Video Worlds</i> .
0.03.25	VHS NTSC	Edited OSLO performance (for those in a hurry).
0.07.17	VHS NTSC	Complete version, <i>Electronic Purgatory: Purgatory</i> .
0.16.16	VHS NTSC	Complete version, <i>Electronic Purgatory: Inferno</i> .
0.28.35	VHS NTSC	Complete version, <i>Electronic Purgatory: Paradise</i> .