

XEN
3-D Movie Concert
Thomas Shannon (Paris)
Jon Hassell (Los Angeles)

A Stereoscopic Film
Written and directed by THOMAS SHANNON
For Presentation in Concert with
A Music Program Composed by JON HASSELL
Performed Live by
THE JON HASSELL ENSEMBLE
Trumpet, Keyboard: Jon Hassell
Acoustic/ ElectronicPercussion: J.A. Deane
Synthesizers: Jean-Philippe Rykiel
Film Created at
DEGRAF-WAHRMAN INC., Hollywood, California
Production BOA, Paris
Commissioned by Ars Electronica (LIVA, Brucknerhaus Linz),
in Co-production with SIGMA Festival Bordeaux.



XEN Description

XEN is a 70 minute stereoscopic, 35 mm film, written and directed by Thomas Shannon. It was created to be presented with live concert performances of new music by the Jon Hassell Ensemble.

This first version of XEN is intended to demonstrate the potentials of a new kind of 3-D film.

XEN combines stereoscopic film, two-dimensional film and video with stereoscopic computer-generated imagery. Artificial intelligence programming enables the generated image particles to behave as though electrically and magnetically charged while at the same time under the influence of variable gravity. 4-dimensional objects interact with 2-dimensional images.

Traditional film editing is augmented by electronic image processing techniques which produce optical events in the air impossible to see in any other way.

This stereoscopic film is created with a new generation of techniques which eliminate previous shortcomings of 3-D films. The viewers are given new polarized glasses which provide full-color images with relaxed visual comfort.

XEN Synopsis

XEN is a myth; an abstract cosmology of creation, romance, growth and the Golden Age that lies ahead of us.

From a single floating point dividing into two, space and time develop into the Universe. Some of the Universe flows into a female form, a goddess, who in turn engenders the Earth.

She descends onto Earth. From there, she contacts the other half of the Universe in the form of a male entity. To meet him, she ascends from Earth, embarking on a dangerous flight through new dimensions, worlds within worlds. She ventures through the wilds of natural forces and metaphysical possibilities, passing through a dark metamorphic void and finally rising into XEN.

There the proto-beings meet, fall in love, dance and procreate. Their fusion gives birth to a new generation with magical powers to enlighten Earth.

Earth begins to realize its potential, eventually rising to a level where it connects it's Sun into the civilization of the stars. The Universe interlinks. We expand beyond universal boundaries, entering into worlds beyond.

Treatment for a 3-D Movie **Thomas Shannon**

Simple stage, four performers and their instruments in front of a large movie screen. The audience is wearing polarized glasses. As the house lights dim, a tiny sphere of light in the center of the screen floats forward over the heads of the audience. It pulses to the first notes of the concert and starts to dance. As it moves, it begins to draw trails of spheres which hang frozen in the air. A sudden surge in the music breathes them to life, the stillness shatters, the air is swimming with brilliant particles. The performers are in the middle of a vibrant three-dimensional color field extending from deep screen directly into the eyes of the audience. The air volume of the concert hall fills with visible sound waves and audible images.

The air molecules uniformly enlarge from their sub-visible world. Their delicate choreography traces layered laceworks through space. Subtle tonal shifts trigger a dimensional chemistry of micro chain-reactions unraveling the helices of acoustic DNA.

Image beams, which seem to emanate from one's eyes, collide with floating sound shapes, careen through atomic crystal lattices, and bounce back into one's head. Space expands. Relativistic currents flow in all directions at mixed velocities. One feels sensations of flying at tremendous speed while at the same time resting motionless in the center of a cyclone. Everything falls away. The audience is ascending. Black metamorphic voids tumble through the air mass. Space twists, splits, undresses and vanishes. Wavers of liquid sound from the rear of the hall whirl forward making wakes and eddies around the performers as they plunge into deep screen. Slow-motion splashes ripple the wet air. Suspended micro-eggs grow into colossal moons, spin, implode softly, then reappear in the distance.

Each performer is enveloped in a vibrating aura of his own music. Patterns launched from each instrument merge in the glowing atmosphere. Erotic phantoms pause face to face with the audience, slowly transforming through a sequence of hallucinatory beings. Swarms of tiny pictures hover in the air within arm's reach, massive forms slide in from the sides.

With a rising pitch, the center of the elastic screen draws back kilometers into the distance. A flood of light energy roars forward ripping up the space behind it as it crashes out into the hall. The molecules are bubbling, convection currents turn space inside out. Gas, liquid, crystalline and plasma states are superimposed. The particles suddenly condense with a bang

into a heavy hovering boulder, which disintegrates slowly into weightless sand. Standing drone patterns pervade the space.

Long magnetic loops span from deep screen star fields into deep brain neurons. Luminous envoys slow-scan through the air. Fragrant tonal blossoms float on hydroponic drum beats.

XEN Music

Jon Hassell

I. I have tried to rid myself of "given" cultural prejudices in order to arrive at an entirely personal set of preferences with which I can play at being a kind of miniature culture with an ongoing, vital "tradition" - the most obvious characteristics of which are to be found in my preference for certain harmonic, melodic, textural and psychological motifs.

XEN continues this concept musically while expanding into the visual realm, and may be thought of as a new ritual in this "tradition".

II. I hold in high esteem that intuitive response in time and place which we call improvisation (too often mistakenly synonymous with "jazz") -an aspect of all non-Western music traditions which seems to me to be an essential ingredient in any art which unfolds in time and which reflects a basic respect for one's listeners to not repeat the same story in the same manner again and again.

Since the soundscore for XEN is performed live, each performance offers an opportunity to explore anew relationships of sound to image, and to embellish the structural plan with acts of spontaneity.

III. A careful listening to my music over the years will reveal a strong preference for an atmosphere of what one might call "sacro-magical" - where, musically speaking, a line of continuity is drawn between the Fertility Symbol, the Madonna, the Playmate and the Void.

Similarly, in XEN, we hope to create a very unusual and exotic atmosphere with the happily unpredictable combining of visual and aural domains - a play in the realms between the Archetype, the Cliche, the Specific and the Universal.

Los Angeles, August 1988

The Surgeon of the Night Sky Restores Dead Things by the Power of Sound

Glenn O'Brien

Jon Hassell is one of the world's most innovative musicians and one of today's most influential composers. His music has established a genre that goes beyond the notions of jazz, fusion, neo-classicism, new music or new age. Jon Hassell's concept of "Fourth World Music" transcends the so-called "primitive" and the so-called "futurist", by seamlessly uniting traditional rhythmic and melodic concepts with recombinant aesthetics made possible by the creations of high technology.

Hassell is a trumpet player who invented a new way to play the trumpet. Since 1972 he has studied the classical Indian music of the Kirana tradition with the master singer Pandit Pran Nath, and he has adapted this vocal technique to the trumpet.

Jon Hassell began his career in composition within the school of minimalism. After earning degrees in music at the Eastman School of Music at Rochester and Catholic University, Hassell studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen. Upon his return to the U.S. in 1967 he

performed and recorded with La Monte Young and Terrey Riley, key figures in the minimalist movement, and began to create his own compositions, as well as planning witty sonic earthworks, such as planting microphones and amplifiers in the trees of Central Park to produce subtle amplification of the wind, leaves, birds and squirrels who came near.

In 1969 Hassell created "Solid State", an electronic work which combined the concepts of minimalism, such as natural tuning, with the idea of music as sculpture, an ambient sound mass shifting with the subtlety of sand dunes.

After his sojourn with Pandit Pran Nath in the early seventies, Jon Hassell began realizing his "Fourth World" concept. His first LP, "Vernal Equinox", 1977, may be considered the first "Fourth World" work. Here Hassell integrated his Kirana style trumpet with electronic effects and with subtly shifting synthesizer drones similar to those of "Solid State" and his minimalist collaborations, with ocean and bird sounds and simple but evocative rhythm tracks. It was a significant album, bringing together raga, minimalism and the cool school.

"Earthquake Island", a 1979 album found Hassell working with a group of exotically rhythmic players including Nana Vasconcelos, percussion, Miroslav Vitous, bass, Badal Roy, tabla, and Clarice Taylor, voice. It was a bold album, combining the ethereal qualities of Hassell's previous work with a powerfully sensual rhythmic context - joining "heavenly" music with "earthy" music in a strikingly beautiful match. Hassell's first two albums caught the attention of Brian Eno, a fellow traveller along and across the theoretical borders between musical genres, and in 1980 Hassell and Eno released the first of their collaborations "Possible Musics/Fourth World Volume One". Eno's high media profile helped this album achieve a great deal of attention and Hassell won a much larger audience among those looking for a music that transcends the limitations of "pop" or "classical". "Possible Musics" was listed by the New York Times (among others) as one of the ten best albums issued in 1980. And it was "Possible Musics" that really set the standard for future "Fourth World" works by Hassell and others.

"Remain in Light" album. It was the first of many requests Hassell would receive to play on tracks by pop bands, and it was one of the few he accepted. (David Sylvian and Peter Gabriel are some of the others he has chosen to play with.)

"Dream Theory in Malaya/Fourth World Volume 2" (1981) continued Hassell's exploration of world musics, achieving his most antipodal mix yet. Here he discovered some extraordinary sounds, including the hypnotic power of "water splash" rhythms.

In 1982 Hassell scored the play "Sulla Strada", an adaptation of Jack Kerouac's "On the Road", which was performed at the Venice Biennale. Le Monde said that the score created "new wave opera", while Italian critics awarded the score the "Ubu", for the best music for a theatrical work of the 1982 season. In the same year Hassell performed at the "World of Music Art and Dance Festival" in Bath, England. Hassell's performance from that festival appears on the anthology "Music and Rhythm".

In 1983 the album "Aka/Darbari/java-Magic Realism" appeared. In the notes for the album Hassell wrote: "... the ability to bring the actual sound of musics of various epochs and geographical origins all together in the same compositional frame marks a unique point in history." And on this album Hassell brought together Indian raga, Senegalese drumming, fifties Hollywood orchestration, pygmy voices and Javanese instrumentation, achieving a new plateau of Fourth World interactivity. The same year marked the beginning of extensive travel by the Jon Hassell Concert Group, which appeared in Japan, Paris, Venice, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Brussels, Oslo, Bergen, Hamburg, Chicago and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Next Wave Festival".

The Jon Hassell Concert Group consisted of Hassell on treated trumpet and keyboards, J.A. Deane on percussion and Jean-Philippe Rykiel on synthesizers. This group appears on the 1986 album, "Power Spot". The new album on Intuition/EMI Records "The Surgeon of the Nightsky Restores Dead Things By the Power of Sound" also includes Richard Horowitz on synthesizers and Michael Brooks on guitar.

In 1986—87 Hassell collaborated with director Peter Sellars on the production of "Zangezi", a play by the Russian futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov, which was produced at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Next Wave Festival". Newsweek's critic Alan Rich wrote that Hassell's score: "throbs with a visionary poetry of it's own."

In 1987 Hassell was commissioned to compose a piece for the Kronos Quartet which they have performed and recorded. "Pano de Costa" appears on their album "White Man Sleeps". Gregg Wager of the Los Angeles Times found it to be the highlight of the string quartet's repertoire (which also includes works by Bela Bartok, Charles Ives and Ornette Coleman).

In 1987, as a part of the "Serious Fun Festival" at Lincoln Center, Jon Hassell performed a concert in collaboration with Farafina, an eight member group of percussionists/singers/dancers from Burkina Faso in Africa, a true Fourth World collaboration which the New York Times' Robert Palmer called "an intriguing interactive process ... achieving an idiomatic integrity of its own." This collaboration will be continued on record with the release in 1988 of a Hassell/Farafina record (coproduced by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, who coproduced Peter Gabriel's album *So*).

Jon Hassell continues to create fascinating, beautiful music and he continues to expand the conceptions of how music can be made. Just when it seemed that music had exhausted its possibilities for growth, Hassell has come along to show how recombination can allow new creation. As he has written: "Perhaps the symbol-bank is near capacity and the only alternative is exploration of ideas reflecting off the surface of other ideas. Or perhaps this is what creative process has always been about ..."

Hassell's favourite recent quote is from Thomas McEvilly from Art Forum: Culture has become like a part of nature, as out of control as any rampaging flood, forest fire, or hurricane."