Elastic Planets

enveloping audiovisual space

BY JASON VAN EYK

Stepping into this black cube is like entering an intergalactic observation deck. Enveloped by mechanical whirs, buzzes and clicks, a parade of heavenly bodies is presented for inspection. This particular set is kaleidoscopic in colour, malleable in shape, kinetic in nature, frenetic in texture, as if the Painters Eleven had created their own solar system. Somewhere, alien voices whisper their own interpretations. The ear strains, until the eye is drawn back to explore the next colour-saturated asteroid. Now the vessel is rumbling with a purring bass. We must be thrusting forward to a new star field . . .

Elastic Planets is the latest work of Ian Birse and Laura Kavanaugh, who have worked together as the intermedia-art operation Instant Places since 1997. Their practice focuses on the creation and use of custom software instruments to make generative installations and live performances that offer idiosyncratic responses to site-specific conditions. In this case, the pair responded to the dimensions, twelve-speaker array, and high-definition video offered by New Adventures in Sound Art's gallery space in Toronto.

The audio content was generated from hours of studio-recorded free improvisations using altered guitar, voice, accordion, and live-sampling software; the visuals were selected from a database of Kavanaugh's hand-drawn digital transparencies. The custom-built audio generator reworked randomly selected ten-second sections of the recorded improvisations, instantly composing an audio field of sonic objects that floated in real space alongside the projected images. The image generator responsively folded and unfolded otherworldly image collages between 2D and 3D representations in response to the audio field, resulting in an imperceptible choreography of perpetual audiovisual feedback.

Elastic Planets seems to be a departure for Instant Places, which typically draws content directly from the surrounding environment. But Birse insists the intent remains the same. "We have always been about involving the

viewer in the act of creation," he asserts. "When we present a performance or generative installation our aim is to make an image-sound world in which the engagement of the present moment generates meanings that are unique to that person's experience."

As Instant Places tackles its next project—an installation-performance in a house in the Gaspésie town of Carleton-sur-Mer—*Elastic Planets* may be of influence. But, Birse says, "the source images and sounds relate to location in ways that remain ambiguous—in the same way that one found object on the street in Buenos Aires may be indistinguishable from one we photograph in Tokyo."

JASON VAN EYK *is a Toronto-based cultural manager, musician, and professional writer.*

LINK: <www.instantplaces.ca>

ON THE CD: *Elastic Planets*
(*live performance*)