EDITORIAL

One hundred years ago in 1912, the art critic Roger Fry coined the term 'visual music' in an attempt to describe Wassily Kandinsky's paintings, generally recognised as the first purely abstract canvases. Connecting Kandinsky's non-representational art to the similarly abstract nature of music was a way to explain and interpret this new art form. Within a decade's time, this analogy was applied to moving images; *Augenmusik* (eye-music) was one of the terms used by the German absolute film movement of the early 1920s. Today, many definitions of visual music exist, though perhaps the most useful refers to visuals composed as if they were music, using musical structures. Another definition refers to a visualisation of music, using the structures of an underlying composition in a new work. Still more examples of visual music include works using manual, mechanical or algorithmic means of transcoding sound to image, pieces which translate images into sound, abstract silent films, and even performance painting and live cinema.

Visual music has also come to refer to a specific cross-disciplinary practice, which originated centuries ago in the tradition of colour organs, and was further developed in cinema in the 1910s and 1920s. It is more popularly known from the work of a group of artists beginning in the 1920s and 30s including Oskar Fischinger, Mary Ellen Bute and Len Lye. Even at this early stage, these visual music pioneers were experimenting with merging the roles of composer and filmmaker; Walter Ruttmann commissioned a score for his film *Opus I* in the 1920s and Fischinger created his own synthetic soundtrack for his *Ornament Sound Experiments* in the 1930s, as did John and James Whitney in the early 1940s. By the middle of the twentieth century, a new generation of animators, including Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambert, had further developed analogue electronic techniques to create sophisticated soundtracks to accompany their images. The accessibility and adaptability of today's visual music technology makes it possible for artists and musicians to build on the earlier analogue efforts at realtime animation – moving the technology out of the museum and into the hands of millions of people. In the next few decades, history's largest cohort of visual music performers will emerge onto the world stage. As noted film historian William Moritz wrote, 'Since ancient times artists have longed to create with moving lights a music for the eye comparable to the effects of sound for the ear. If they were less successful than composers of auditory music, the sole reason rests in the fact that light is harder to manipulate than air' (Moritz 1986: 1). With today's technology, light has become as easy to control as air.

Our first group of articles approaches visual music through the language of music. In 'From Sonic Art to Visual Music: Divergences, Convergences, Intersections' Diego Garro presents a new approach for the electroacoustic community to relate to, and engage with: the visual music phenomenon. He covers the intersection of the two art forms from technological, historical and cultural perspectives, drawing connections from electroacoustic music to visual music. In the next article, Bill Alves focuses on a single relationship between visuals and music, that of consonance and dissonance, in the appropriately titled article 'Consonance and Dissonance in Visual Music'. Alves uses concepts of stability and instability or tension and resolution to provide a structural model for the analysis of his own work as well as that of Oskar Fischinger and John Whitney. Next, Anton Fuxjäger attempts to categorise three basic types of connections between music and non-representational moving images in 'Translation, Emphasis, Synthesis, Disturbance: On the Function of Music in Visual Music'. He divides up the different roles that music can play in the production and reception of visual music into 1) music translations, 2) synthetic structures, and 3) mutual disturbance, providing helpful examples of each. In the final article, Lindsay Vickery takes an entirely different approach to the term visual music, focusing on musical scores as artistic object. In 'The Evolution of Notational Innovations from the Mobile Score to the Screen Score', Vickery considers the varied goals of the composers who initiated developments in dynamic scoring from Earle Brown's first open scores to realtime computer generated notations.

Although these authors come from a music background, historically many visual music films often began with the image. Visual artists searched for an appropriate score to complement their finished animated films, or commissioned accompanying compositions. It took James Whitney two years to find the perfect soundtrack for his masterpiece *Yantra*, first releasing it as a silent film in 1957. In 1959, Jordan Belson suggested a opera score by Dutch composer Henk Badings, an edit of which became the

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final score for *Yantra*. Belson himself spent many months looking for the perfect soundtrack for his *Allures* (1961), finally deciding to compose it himself in collaboration with sound artist Henry Jacobs. Exceptions exist with Len Lye (*Free Radicals*) and Harry Smith (*Films 1–3* of his *Early Abstractions* series), both of whom related how they 'danced around the room' while listening to a piece of music, attempting to animate it by painting and scratching onto blank film stock, their bodies translating the music by gyrating and painting. These were precursors to the development of live visual music painting performances – a practice which continues today.

For Fischinger, as for many contemporary visual music artists who first come to visual music as musicians, by contrast, starting with sound was more often the rule than the exception. He would plan his animation in great detail by measuring the grooves in the LP records, timing the record as it turned, and mapping out a graph of the music before beginning his hand-drawn animation. Fischinger's musical approaches, though, are some of the most varied of all of the historical visual music artists, and are mentioned by several authors here. One of his most remarkable and well-known visual music films is the silent *Radio Dynamics* (1942). And, while perhaps not of major interest to this journal's readership, it is important to remember there is also a strong tradition of silent visual music, including Thomas Wilfred's *Lumia*, James Whitney's film *Wu Ming* and many films by Stan Brakhage.

In our second set of articles, authors focus on individual projects contextualised within the broad scope of the term visual music. In 'The Oramics Machine: From Vision to Reality', Peter Manning describes the development of this unusual, and in many respects visionary, graphical synthesiser, both in terms of the creative objectives that inspired its design and also the functional characteristics of the resulting technology. Oram's project follows a long tradition of visual music artists developing their own machines and systems to realise their visions, from Fischinger (Wax–Slicing machine, Ornament Sound and Lumigraph) and the Whitney Brothers (pendulum sound devices, motion cam machine, adapted analogue computers), to contemporary artists who write their own code to achieve their artistic and sonic vision. Ryo Ikeshiro writes his own generative processes to create both sound and video, which he often performs live. He explains his audiovisual work, *Construction in Zhuangzi*, using metaphors based on musical textures to describe a multitude of approaches to the visual music medium. Similar to the Oramics Machine, he uses simultaneous representation of the same data in both the audio and the video domains, harnessing the power of cross-modal synergy. Conversely, Ewa Trębacz investigates separation and manipulation of visual and sonic spatial cues in 'Depth Modulation: Composing Motion in Immersive Audiovisual Spaces'. Within her own work *Errai* she combines stereoscopic video and ambisonic sound, using perceived depth of the audiovisual space as an additional dimension for artistic expression.

There is a rich history of visual music artists exploring stereoscopic work, from the late 1940s onward. The investigation of immersive visuals and sound for a audiovisual experience came to fruition in Jordan Belson and Henry Jacobs's 1957–59 Vortex Concerts at San Francisco's Morrison Planetarium. The Vortex Concerts represented the first use of experimental music and visuals in a planetarium. With 38 speakers in a circular setting plus a custom early 'joystick'-type controller, these visual music presentations created a sense of 'whirling' the sound around the room.

In the final section, three very different scholars explore diverse methodologies to frame audiovisual experiences. Andrew Uroskie explores Robert Breer's 'film accompaniment' to the 1964 production of Stockhausen's *Originale*. While the visuals were completely untethered from the musical performance, Uroskie argues that Breer's three-part film performance extends Stockhausen's aesthetic and conceptual framework and creates a 'post-Cagean' framework for visual music. Joseph Hyde frames noise and silence in '*Musique Concrète* Thinking in Visual Music Practice: Audio-visual Silence and Noise, Reduced Listening and Visual Suspension'. In his own practice Hyde takes ideas unique to *musique concrète* and applies them to visual music works, using time-based camera-sourced video material. In the final article Brian Kane also explores the Schaefferian legacy, by dissecting the strange and complicated history of the word 'acousmatic'. This article returns us to the realm of pure organised sound, albeit by exploring definitions which require negating the visual.

It is encouraging to read such varied essays on visual music today. An emphasis on practice and lack of scholarship has characterised the field, although this appears to be changing. There is room for much more work to be done, and these authors are at the forefront of this investigation. As visual music continues to gain eager new practitioners worldwide, increased research and publication is essential. Ideally scholars from both visual and musical disciplines will continue to advance our understanding of this compelling hybrid art form.

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REFERENCE

Moritz, William. 1986. Towards an Aesthetics of Visual Music. *ASIFA Canada Bulletin* **14**(3): 1–3.

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VISUAL MUSIC IMAGES FROM THE ARCHIVES OF CENTER FOR VISUAL MUSIC

No editorial on visual music would be complete without images from the practice. The Center for Visual Music (CVM, www.centerforvisualmusic.org) has given us permission to reproduce a few images from their archive. CVM is a nonprofit archive dedicated to visual music, experimental animation and abstract cinema. Its collections include a large body of films and preserved film material for the most significant historical artists including Oskar Fischinger, Jordan Belson, John and James Whitney, Charles Dockum, Mary Ellen Bute and others, plus an extensive Hy Hirsh photography collection. CVM does not just preserve film; its extensive research library contains the world's largest collection of visual-music-related resources, including the original papers of Oskar Fischinger and film historian William Moritz.

VISUAL MUSIC

Synchronized in ABSTRACT FILMS *by Expanding Cinema*

"SYNCHROMY No. 2"

Designed and Produced by
MARY E. BUTE and THEODORE J. NEMETH

Music, we say, stirs the "imagination" which is also the power of creating images. Though modern artists have proved that abstract shapes create a mood through the eye as sound creates moods through the ear, they have lacked one essential for matching music with visual images — the essential of **MOTION.** Here, through the resources of the Sound Motion Picture, is presented ——

"SYNCHROMY No. 2" . . . A pictorial composition of abstract forms in motion and changing light creating a mood through the eye as Wagner's "Evening Star", sung by Reinald Werrenrath, creates a mood through the ear. In **"SYNCHROMY No. 2",** endlessly changing and rhythmically developing three dimensional forms and light patterns melt into stimulating designs, separating to reunite for more gracious patterns in never-ending metamorphosis.

In this composition the music and the visual material are related rhythmically and in "idea" concept — the symbolism of Taunhauser's flowering rod and simplified Gothic arches being utilized as visual themes.

Mary Ellen Bute publicity flyer *c*. 1935, one of the first uses of the phrase 'visual music' in English to describe film.

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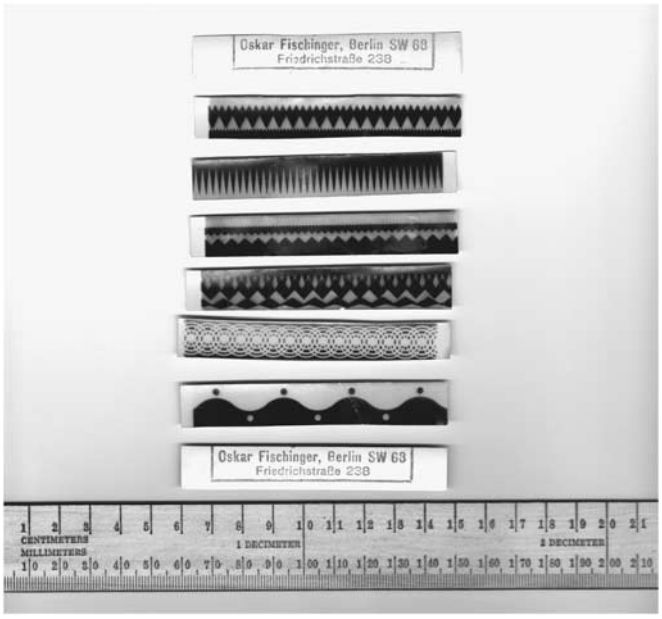

Examples from Oskar Fischinger's Ornament Sound experiments, *c*. 1932.

Oskar Fischinger with sound strips from his synthetic sound experiments, *c*. 1948. Image © Fischinger Trust.

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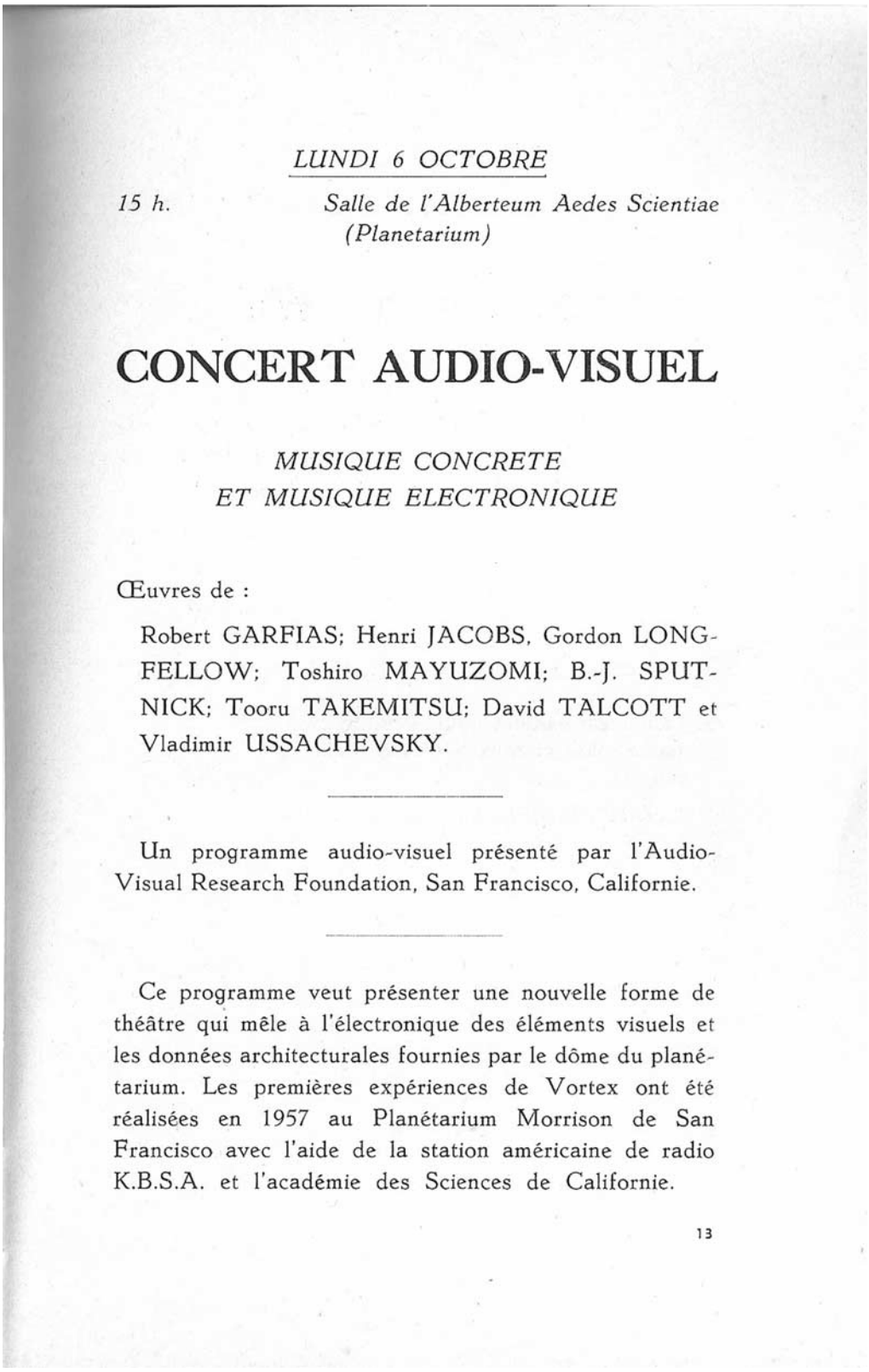

LUNDI 6 OCTOBRE

15 h. *Salle de l'Alberteum Aedes Scientiae (Planetarium)*

CONCERT AUDIO-VISUEL

MUSIQUE CONCRETE
ET MUSIQUE ELECTRONIQUE

Œuvres de :

Robert GARFIAS; Henri JACOBS, Gordon LONGFELLOW; Toshiro MAYUZOMI; B.-J. SPUTNICK; Tooru TAKEMITSU; David TALCOTT et Vladimir USSACHEVSKY.

Un programme audio-visuel présenté par l'Audio-Visual Research Foundation, San Francisco, Californie.

Ce programme veut présenter une nouvelle forme de théâtre qui mêle à l'électronique des éléments visuels et les données architecturales fournies par le dôme du planétarium. Les premières expériences de Vortex ont été réalisées en 1957 au Planétarium Morrison de San Francisco avec l'aide de la station américaine de radio K.B.S.A. et l'académie des Sciences de Californie.

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Programme from 1958 Journées internationales de musique expérimentale, with Jordan Belson and Henry Jacobs's performances of their Vortex Concerts in Brussels.

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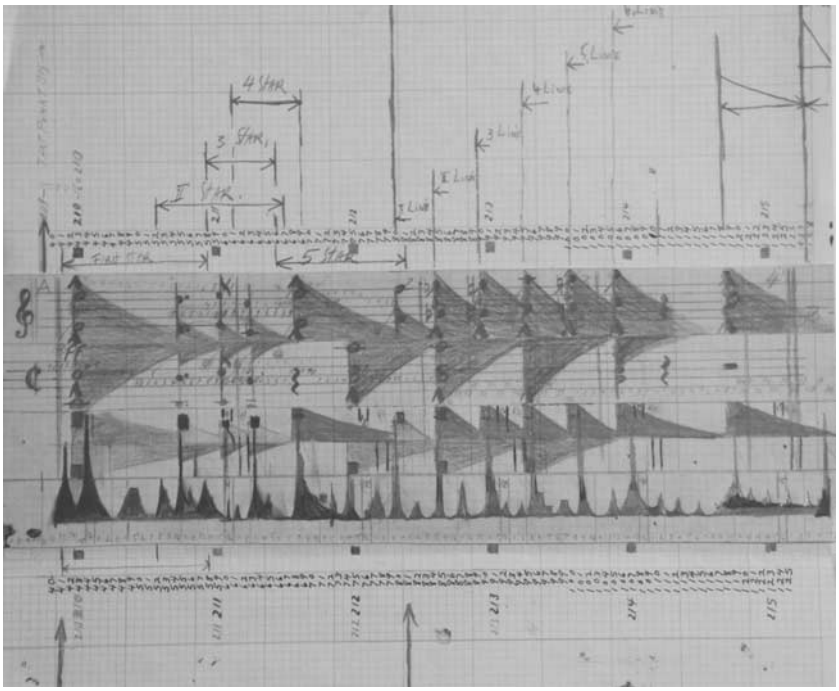
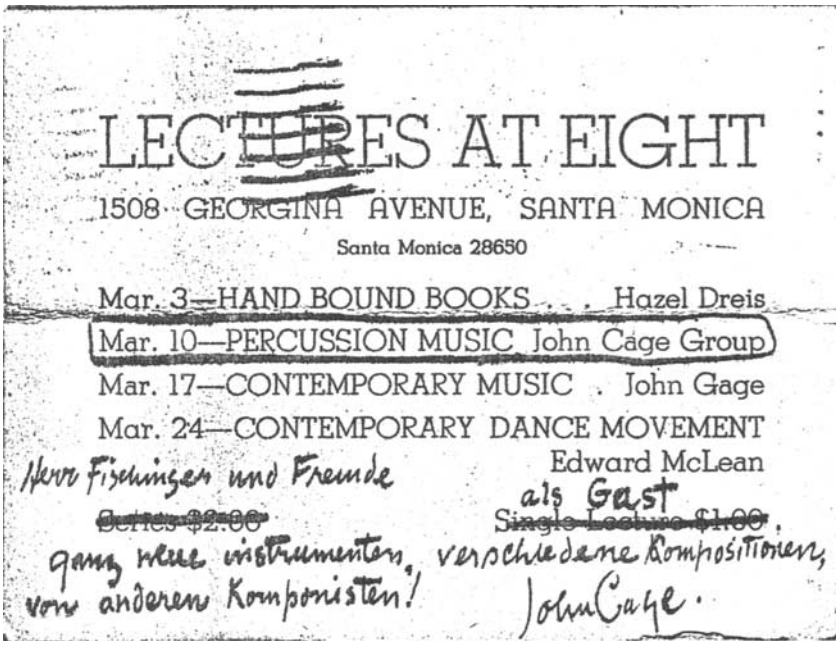


Detail from Oskar Fischinger's score with graphic and text annotations for his film *An American March*, 1941.



Invitation from John Cage to Oskar Fischinger, 1937.

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