

THE BEACON HERALD

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■ **DIGITAL MEDIA:** A conference that wrapped up Friday showcased the riveting results when technology meets the arts

Marriage with arts mesmerizing

MIKE BEITZ
Staff Reporter

Whether it's chronotopes, multi-channel spectral delay, algorithmic sound diffusion, metric multiplicities or low-latency convolution engines, one thing is clear: digital media are changing the performing arts, and the performing arts are returning the favour.

That was the focus of the Challenging Digital Media conference that wrapped up Friday at the city hall auditorium with a

number of informative, innovative and interactive presentations on the fusion of technology and the arts.

"Our artwork and research describes the hookup between human and machine, between musical inspiration and digital concept," said Austrian composer and media artist Andreas Weixler before launching into a fascinating virtuoso audiovisual performance on the auditorium stage.

Entitled "Colours of a Wooden Flute", it featured musician Se-

Lien Chuang playing a flute while Weixler manipulated and transformed the sound with a series of complex digital processing machines, some of which were programmed to operate independently. On the massive video screen above them, a series of flowing abstract images were synchronized with music that enveloped the room.

The effect was at times eerie, at times haunting, at times moving, at times jarring and distorted, but always mesmerizing.

And because the interaction

between the musicians, between the machines and between the musicians and the machines is never the same, each performance is a unique improvisational work with a life of its own, noted Weixler.

"It's not to be predictable, what I do," he told the audience. "I only can give it a direction, like a swarm of birds."

The interaction between music and digital media was a recurring theme in four of the five presentations yesterday.

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■ **CONFERENCE**

Art, technology link defined

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Paul Theberge, a professor and former Canada research chairperson and director of the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture at Carleton University, discussed the way in which society's approach to traditional instruments and music is changing in the digital age.

A "tinkering mentality" is emerging, he said, suggesting that a piano or a guitar is not just a device that makes music anymore but is increasingly being seen as a "field of possibilities."

Digital devices, programs and the Internet are now being used to change, reshape, reinterpret and even extend the music experience, he said.

But there's one constant.

"We need to understand music as it has always been, a social network," said Theberge.

Kenneth Fields, Canada research chairperson in Telemedia Arts at the University of Calgary, illustrated that idea with his demonstration of collaborative artistic performances over high-speed research networks.

Speaking from Calgary through teleconference, Fields outlined his research on "network art," showing examples of musicians or dancers in several different countries performing together, with linked sound and video.

The link between art and technology was further defined by McGill University profes-

sor and recording engineer and researcher Wieslaw Woszczyk with his Virtual Haydn project.

That involves sophisticated computer programming and equipment to reconstruct authentic and historical acoustic environments that serve as the setting for the composer's music.

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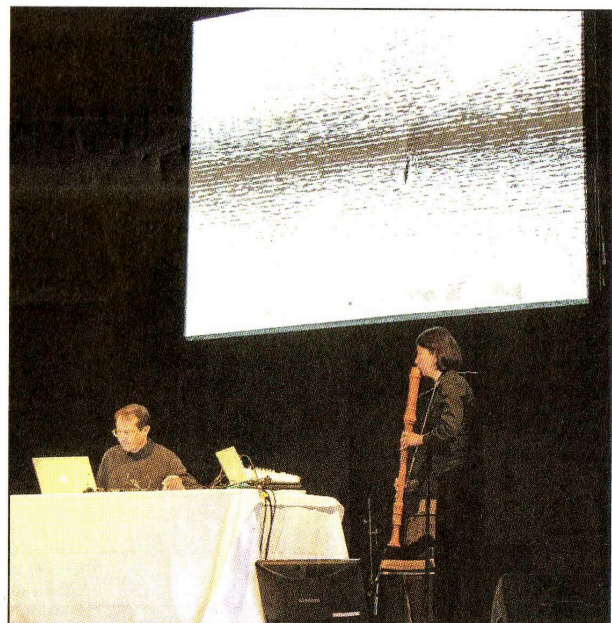
Carleton's Paul Theberge

The conference concluded with a live screening of the National Film Board of Canada's Emmy-Award-winning documentary *Out My Window*, an interactive look at high-rise communities around the world.

"It's not about buildings; it's about people," said director Kat Cizek beforehand as she and senior producer Gerry Flahive introduced the groundbreaking global multimedia project.

"It's really about human stories and peeling back those walls of highrise buildings as we discover an incredible range of human experience," said Flahive.

The documentary features 49 individual segments showing a three-dimensional, interactive view of highrise apartments — the most common built form



MIKE BEITZ The Beacon Herald

Austrian composer and media artist Andreas Weixler digitally manipulates the sound as Se-Lien Chuang plays the wooden flute during a unique audiovisual performance at the city hall auditorium Friday as part of the Challenging Digital Media conference.

over the last century — from 13 different countries, as tenants tell their touching, sometimes tragic and often uplifting stories.

The documentary can be seen at <http://highrise.nfb.ca>

The Challenging Digital Media:

The Performing Arts conference was hosted by the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus in partnership with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and the National Arts Centre.

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