

Avatar Orchestra Metaverse

Written by Zubbie Capalini.

Images courtesy of AOM. (Image 1) Loop Luo, (Image 2 & 5) Bingo Onomatopoei, (Image 3 & 4) Sugar Seville.

Avatar Orchestra Metaverse (AOM) are a core group of composers, musicians and sound artists who come together to perform live gigs on instruments they've built themselves. So far so oh hum you say, except that in this case these guys perform exclusively in the virtual world of Second Life, through their avatars.

But rather than trying to recreate Real Life (RL) instruments to perform RL music, AOM are adamant that "we try to concentrate on the strengths of SL, that is spatial sound, worldwide communication and immediate contact to potential collaborators. The composition itself usually means that somebody has an idea, generates some samples, we see how they sound when played by the orchestra and then Bingo will build an instrument to play them, together with some means of visualising the point when the single avatar plays back a sound. And: yes, we often have scores, but more in a modern John Cage way. Most of the time we follow a conductor, but this is also done in a more modern, improvisational approach."

According to AOM member Gumnosophistai Nurmi, "an apparent factor distinguishing Avatar Orchestra Metaverse from other musical events within Second Life is that they realize that the common props, the look alike instrument the performer looks like it is playing on, will never be anything but props in Second Life. This gives them the opportunity to also employ other ways of visualizing the sound performance, and indeed the orchestra counts among its members programmers, architects, visual and performance artists as well as musicians and the entire possible mixed breed. The visual aspect of a Avatar Orchestra Metaverse concert can be a bewildering experience."

As Bingo Onomatopoeia explains, the orchestra uses tools afforded by the multi-player gaming platform to play together from remote locations:

"The instruments are seen and operated by the performer as controls on the screen, in vehicles and games this is commonly named a HUD (Head Up Display). The single notes/sounds are triggered with the mouse. For most instruments we have visualisation-devices - a gadget worn on the back of the avatar that changes shape and color when a note is played. The latest improvements are animations that move the avatar in sync with the notes. This is not necessary for generating the music itself, but it is an important clue for the audience about what is happening: We usually mix into the audience, so there is no stage/audience situation with known instruments or orchestra-roles that

makes it clear who is doing what at which particular moment. I think this is one of the big advantages of SL: We can create completely new settings for our performances and are in direct contact with our listeners. “

And because of the nature of the internet, whilst the orchestra performs composed pieces, there is always an element of improvisation since, as Gumnosophistai points out: “the ever present time delays affecting all use of broadband cooperation will also add to the indetermination here. Simply put, it takes time from playing the sound to hearing the sound. Even if the orchestra perform composed pieces and do attempt to follow a score and a conductor, all the factors in live performances are dependent on both the performers and the environment. It will never achieve the same piece sound exactly the same each time. By not only accepting these limitations, but also embracing them, the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse approach Second Life as the instrument itself. “

The result is a blend of acousmatic and electronic music, experimental in every aspect, and it makes for a great listening, and interactive, experience.

Second Life is providing a new platform and a new audience for musicians, and many are embracing it as an opportunity of streaming Real Life musical events. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra has recently announced such an event, and we will be able to see and hear a Real Life live performance in a virtual philharmonic hall in Second Life. AOM takes the opposite approach. Their live concerts in Second Life are usually timed to be part of a Real Life festival somewhere, so that the Real Life audience can watch the performance on screen in real time.

But it's not quite the same as being “inworld” as Gumnosophistai explains: “The audience experience in Second Life is essential to the performances of Avatar Orchestra Metaverse. As a listener to inworld performance you will hear the music according to where you place yourself with respect to the performers. You will hear the performer close to you better than you will hear the performer further away. With both the performers and you the listener moving around in space, you practically engage in a live sound installation, making a concert very much a three dimensional listening experience.”

Taking that one step further, Miulew Takahe tells us “maybe the future plans include playing live with all orchestra members on a Real Life location - with some RL copies of our SL instruments.!!! Yes - truly we are discussing this, and it would be a very nice thing to do.”

The core members of the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse are: Maximillian Nakamura (in RL Shintaro Miyazaki in Germany), musician, composer founded the orchestra in February 2007. Hars Hefferman (aka Harold Schellinx in RL in

France), composer, writer who was originator of the first publicly performed piece called Vicky's Mosquitos #13. Miulew Takahe (in RL Björn Eriksson in Sweden), musician and sound artist, Bingo Onomatopeia, (in RL Andreas Müller in Germany), musician and programmer, Wirxli Flimflam (in RL Jeremy Owen Turner in Canada), composer and performance artist, Gumnosophistai Nurmi (in RL Leif Inge based in Oslo, Norway), sound artist, composer.

Find out more (and have a listen!) at:

<http://avatarorchestra.blogspot.com>

<http://www.myspace.com/avatarorchestra>

Avatar Orchestra Google Group: http://groups.google.com/group/aom_sl