

DIFFERENT SKIES

OCTOBER 9, 2004 ↘ ARCOSANTI

▣ What Is Different Skies?

Different Skies is an electronic space music festival, a workshop for artists in these and related experimental music genres, a working vacation, an intensive and rewarding creative environment, and many more things. I began Different Skies in 2003 with the assistance of Tucson musician and radio show host Doug Wellington, as an opportunity that rarely presents itself in the rarefied world of space music: a chance for members of our community to get together for an extended period of time in a controlled and isolated environment, to network and learn from one another, form new professional alliances and new friendships, and to create and perform an evening of entirely original new music for an enthusiastic audience.

Electronic music, which features the synthesizer and computer as prominently as it does traditional amplified and acoustic instruments, is traditionally viewed as a lonely art form, created by musicians working alone in small studios. Opportunities to build community among these musicians are rare, and I have experimented with them for many years. Team Metlay, with its biennial gatherings of musicians from 1990 to 1998 and eventual trilogy of CD releases, was a good first step... but only a first step.

The second step was to find a place which was inspiring and welcoming to visiting musicians, where rehearsals could be both relaxed and energetic, with a fixed goal in mind while allowing for flexibility of scheduling on a day to day basis. Arcosanti, with its wonderful admixture of futuristic architecture and art-colony sensibility, seemed a perfect choice.

Artists and Arcosanti residents alike approached last year's Different Skies with some trepidation; it was, after all, an untried idea that required the cooperation of over a dozen artists who'd never met before, working with a community that had never met them or heard much of their music. Fortunately our choice of artists and musical styles was fortuitous, and the Arcosanti community proved welcoming and supportive, leading to an exceptional experience for all concerned. It was a measure of our success that all but two of last year's artists have returned for this year's show.

We're back again for an encore, with artists old and new, a new palette of ideas, and a lot of energy and drive to create beauty for you. We plan to have a lot of fun tonight, and we hope you do too. We'll see you in the Amphitheatre!

—Mike Metlay, *Founder and Coordinator, Different Skies*

■ What Will Happen

We can't tell you precisely what the form of tonight's show will be; as these notes are being prepared for print, *Different Skies* is still some time in the future and nothing has been cast in stone as yet. However, we can make some guesses as to what you can expect.

The music you're going to hear tonight has never been performed anywhere else. There will be a few pieces that were composed beforehand that will receive their live debut this evening, but for the most part what you'll hear was composed here over the past several days – some of it spontaneously improvised right on the spot, with few if any preset rules.

While there will be a number of computers on stage, please don't assume that you're hearing prerecorded music. With sixteen musicians available to play parts, there's really no need! The computers will take on two primary roles tonight. One is to be played as actual instruments, replacing one or more traditional synthesizers with their "virtual" equivalents (a laptop is far easier to travel with by air than a stack of full-sized keyboards!). The other is to interact with the playing of the musicians to create music that is live and spontaneous yet too complex for human hands alone – to enhance and extend live performance rather than to replace it.

As is the case with any live performance where there's no safety net, there is always the possibility that something will go wrong – anything from wrong notes and missed cues to a complete power failure (a highlight of last year's show). Take a cue from us – it is possible to take one's art seriously without taking oneself seriously, and we'll do our best to come up smiling.

In fact, there will almost certainly be moments during the show that are well worth a belly laugh, and we encourage you not to assume it's impolite. The instruments are electronic, but the emotions we create here – exaltation, introspection, sadness, terror, joy – are very real, and should be shared. It's quite likely that the show will go on for quite some time, with brief breaks between songs and movements; we encourage you to move about, stretch your legs, even stretch out and close your eyes to what we perform (assuming you can tear your eyes away from the videography!).

We also encourage you to visit the merchandise table and purchase albums by our various artists; the profits go directly to us to help defray our considerable costs in putting on this show, and the music is memorable and well worth taking home to savor. Ask lots of questions, and we'll try to steer you to music that you'll enjoy. Or be experimental and try something entirely new!

No matter what happens, we hope you'll sit back, relax, and enjoy the sights and sounds of *Different Skies*!

▣ **The Stage Performers** *in alphabetical order...*

DAVE BREWER, from Phoenix, Arizona, is the youngest of the Different Skies participants, but has already garnered a considerable reputation in the space music community. As a participant in the Ricochet Gatherings, an annual series of get-togethers for electronic music enthusiasts, he has recorded improvisational space music with artists from the British space music trio **AirSculpture** and the Dutch group **Free System Projekt**. Dave's music is a lyrical and beautiful fusion of electronic timbres with the traditional sound of the grand piano. His second CD, *Harmonic Convergence*, has just been released.

For this year's show, Dave will be playing digital piano/workstation and analog synthesizer keyboards, and playing electronic percussion on a unique electronic drum called the Roland HandSonic. Please be assured that any noises emanating from this device when Dave smashes it with his forehead are intentional.

JIM COMBS is one half of the Atlanta-based electronic duo **TouchXtone** (www.touchxtone.com). Their first two album releases, appropriately entitled *One* and *Two*, are a fascinating mixture of traditional space music and soundscapes with modern rhythmic and dance styles. Jim is new to Different Skies this year, and brings with him a powerful drive to carry the event forward in growth and success.

Jim will be playing a portable keyboard rig based on a laptop computer, or he'll be playing a series of hardware synthesizer modules, or he'll be playing something else. He's too much of a "big concept" guy to worry about the details too much.

RUSSELL FOSTER is a Phoenix native, a solo electronic artist who creates ambient music with a tribal edge under the name **Una Voce**. His album *Provenance* will be among several of his creations available for sale at the show. Rus has over twenty years' experience as a guitarist, drummer, and keyboardist, and brings an exceptional artistic sensibility to this, his first Different Skies. Rus will be performing on keyboards, guitars, and electronic percussion, including a large rack of vintage drum triggers set up to provide a wide variety of synthetic timbres. He has promised not to smack any other performers that sneak over to steal a hit or two.

BILL FOX is one of the most influential people in the world electronic community. A tireless promoter of the genre in the Northeastern United States, he runs three radio broadcasts of electronic and modern progressive music on two radio stations, which can be heard on streaming Internet radio at www.muhlenberg.edu/wmuh and www.wdiy.org. A multi-instrumentalist who's equally at home on guitar, bass, saxophone, and keyboards, he has lent his talents to the *Ricochet Dreams* albums as well as to a collaboration

with world-famous space musician **VidnaObmana**, and he plays in a number of musical groups in eastern Pennsylvania, including **Xeroid Entity**, who performed at last year's Different Skies.

Bill is concentrating on guitars this year, with electric guitar and Hawaiian lap steel being treated by electronic processing to create otherworldly tones. Bill makes use of looping echo devices to accompany himself and build up thick textures of guitar music. As a result of this technique, any mistakes Bill makes will be repeated for quite a while, so he'd best be careful, hadn't he?

BRIAN GOOD hails from northern Ohio and has been a quiet but pervasive force in the Internet electronic music community for over twenty years. An accomplished jazz woodwind player, he alternates traditional jazz dates with experiments in electronic noise, processing acoustic saxophone as well as electronic instruments. After decades of quiet experimentation in his personal studio and work with the Detroit-based electronic group **Electric Spring**, he stunned the audience at last year's Different Skies with the eclectic and absorbing music of a project he dubbed **Sundagger**.

This year, Brian will play a variety of acoustic woodwinds, as well as the Akai Electronic Wind Instrument, an extraordinary machine that translates the nuances of saxophone playing, including the breathing of the artist, into electronic signals that can control synthesizers directly. The results range from exquisite to merely sick; value judgments as to which is which are being left to the audience.

JAMES LACEY is one half of the electronic music duo **Mutation Vector**. He hails from the Philadelphia area, and his driving sequences and melodic lines scatter fascination across the tracks of Mutation Vector's debut record *Placebo Merchant*. James opened the 2003 Different Skies concert with a performance that had the audience up on its feet within the first few minutes, captivating his fellow artists with a little-known and unique electronic voice.

James will be performing on the Alesis airSynth, an electronic musical instrument controlled entirely by gestures in mid-air over its antenna. If he reaches for the control knobs on a small blue box in front of him, the audience is advised to run, not walk, for the exits.

MIKE METLAY is the Founder and Coordinator of Different Skies, and the prime mover of the electronic music production company **Atomic City** (www.atomiccity.com), with over a dozen CD releases in the past decade. His experiments in Internet-assisted musical collaboration in the late 1980s became the seminal electronic music group **Team Metlay**, whose three CDs are enjoyed worldwide. Since disbanding Team Metlay in 1999, Mike has created the space meditation album *A Huge And Silent Place* as part of the duo **Ozma**, and has launched a long-delayed solo career with his live concert recording *After Silence*.

At this year's Different Skies, Mike will combine electronic keyboards, realtime effects manipulation devices, and wind and stringed instruments in an unusual configuration carefully designed to hide the fact that he doesn't actually know how to play anything.

PAUL NAGLE comes from England and has a career spanning well over twenty years in the electronic music world, including some two dozen successful albums as solo artist and with other musicians (see www.paulnagle.co.uk). His career spans electronic styles from the traditions of the 1970s "Berlin School" to the more melodic offerings of his duo **Binar** with electronic music luminary **Andy Pickford**, to the harsher dance-oriented soundscapes of **Headshock** and the trance music of the light-hearted CD *Grow* by the **Joint Intelligence Committee**. He runs his own music label, **Bogus Focus Records** (www.bogusfocus.com), and continues to release albums on many different independent space music labels.

This is Paul's first year at Different Skies, and he will be playing digital sampling and resynthesis devices that take ordinary sounds, process them, and play them back in embarrassing ways. If, during dinner, you see someone pointing a microphone at you, be careful what you say... you'll be hearing it again tonight. Along with the rest of the audience.

OTSO PAKARINEN is the owner of **Visual Power**, a music label in Helsinki, Finland. Otso has been releasing music of one form or another since the 1980s, as a soloist and with the Finnish electropop group **Tapa Paha Tapa**. His latest project is a trio of albums by **Ozone Player** (www.ozoneplayer.com), which combine intricate electronic structure with dramatic excitement and a rare streak of broad humor. Ozone Player's fourth album, still in progress, is *Frozen Paint On Boiling Canvas*, from which a selection of pieces will be good-naturedly mangled tonight.

Otso will be creating electronic sounds entirely from software running on a laptop computer. This system allows an entire music studio to be compacted to the size of one small box, requiring only a keyboard to play the virtual instruments. Otso will also, despite dire threats from the other performers, do the **Happy Finn Dance** at random points in the performance.

GILES REAVES has been producing solo albums for over a decade; his album *Sea Of Glass* reached the Top 20 on the Billboard Magazine New Age Charts when it was released in 1992. Giles lives and works in Nashville, Tennessee, where he is a well-respected audio engineer as well as a first-call keyboardist; he has appeared on several albums by the Nashville-based electronic music collective **SPACECRAFT**, and most recently he played the Alfa Centauri festival with **Dave Fulton** and **Paul Vnuk Jr.** His website is at <http://spaceformusic.com/gilesreaves.html>.

Giles will be quietly sitting at two keyboards, which will erupt with everything from traditional instruments to a full brass section to a rock'n'roll

drum kit, changing abruptly from sound to sound throughout the evening. Sometimes the sounds he chooses will even go with what everyone else is playing!

NICK ROTHWELL is currently based in London, England. His professional recording and performance project, known as **CASSIEL** (www.cassiel.com), has been creating live electronic music for modern dance for over fifteen years, first as a duet with space musician **Glyn Lloyd-Jones** and then as a solo act. Nick has also co-produced and performed on all three **Team Metlay** albums. Nick's works have been performed with dance companies all over England and Scotland as well as with the **Frankfurt Ballett**, in Vienna, and in Istanbul, Paris, Zurich, and Tokyo. His debut solo album *Listen/Move* was released on Atomic City in 1998.

Nick is making his Different Skies debut this year. His music rig is based around custom computer software that translates simple control movements into complex and beautiful musical gestures, completely controlled by the artist but extrapolating his movements into ideas not playable by human hands. So it only looks like he's not actually doing anything. Really.

CLARK SALISBURY is a session guitarist from Portland, Oregon, who works in a wide range of genres beyond space music and whose specialties include electronic guitar processing and the triggering of synthesizers with special pickups. He performed at last year's Different Skies show in support of **Dweller At The Threshold**, and has returned this year as a solo artist. Clark will be performing on electric guitar, heavily processed through a variety of sound manipulation devices as well as controlling traditional synthesizers and sound modules. His rig can make every kind of noise anyone else on stage can, and he will spend the evening gleefully demonstrating this, over and over again.

CHRISTOPHER SHORT is an electric guitarist and half of the electronic space music duo **Ma Ja Le** (www.majale.com), based in the Milwaukee area. He has also created a series of albums featuring his unique brand of electronic guitar textures and interactive audio loops, both solo and in concert with well-known electronic artists **Vir Unis** and **James Johnson**. His most recent CD is *Duende*. Chris's rig for this evening's performance consists of an electronic guitar wired into an intricate network of effects, processors, audio echo and looping devices, and mixing/routing equipment, all packed into a rack case that is (to be fair) smaller and lighter than a refrigerator. It remains to be seen if Chris can make it to showtime without suffering a hernia, but assuming he doesn't, he should put on quite a show.

PAUL VNUK JR. is an audio engineer and the other half of the electronic space music duo **Ma Ja Le**. He has also worked with space music pioneers **Vir Unis** and **James Johnson**, and has released a beautiful ambient solo

album entitled *Silence Speaks In Shadow*. He plays not only keyboards and traditional Third World wind instruments but also is an accomplished drummer and percussionist, working with kit drums, native and Latin percussion, and electronic percussion devices.

Paul will be performing with compact digital modular synthesizers, and with sensitive electronic percussion devices that are designed to interact closely with drum technique. He will also do a lot of standing around trying to figure out when to jump in, which is fine – if he played all the time, no one else would get a note in edgewise.

TIM WALTERS is a San Francisco experimental musician whose many projects are brought together under the realm of the **Doubtful Palace** (www.doubtfulpalace.com). He has created dense processed electronic soundscapes in his solo album *The Dry Well*, performed live electroacoustic improvisation with **Circular Firing Squad**, recorded unusual children's music for adults in **Slaw**, and darkly humorous acoustic music with **Pledge Drive**. Tim has based his entire music production system for Different Skies on an Apple laptop computer running the powerful SuperCollider music creation language. As a result, when he is not playing woodwinds, he will look like he's doing his taxes. He believes this is better than the **Happy Finn Dance**.

GREG WALTZER participates in a number of musical projects in and around Philadelphia and southern New Jersey: **Mutation Vector**, **Xeroid Entity**, **Holosphere**, and **Fringe Element**. These groups team Greg with area musicians **James Lacey**, **Bill Fox**, **Howard Moscovitz**, **José (JEM) Murcia**, and **Michael Victor**. He has most recently appeared on Xeroid Entity's self-released CD *Moons Of Saturn*. Learn more at <http://waltzer.crosswinds.net/egw/music.htm>. Greg plans to spend the entire program hunched carefully over his keyboards, turning knobs and making evil noises. He has a homemade device that looks like a steel shoebox with bad acne sitting atop his keyboard rig; if he reaches for it, the audience are advised to take a hint from the other players on stage and grab hold of anything that won't move when the blast wave hits.

■ The Video Artists

DAVID TRISTRAM is the owner and creative director of **Tristram Visual** (www.tristram.com), a live video production company specializing in the creation of real-time visual synthesis. David's work centers around what he terms **viviography**, the ability to listen to and interact with music, creating visuals that meld with the music without having to pre-record either. He does this by combining premade looped video, computer-based graphics, and other effects in a live mixing environment to create a seamless visual experience well-suited to the music of Different Skies. David's performance roster includes many successful runs at the **Woodstockhausen** experi-

mental music festival in San Francisco, and the **Omnimedia** new-media festivals. David will be assisted for tonight's performance by Phoenix-based video artist **Duane Ford**.

David and Duane will be sitting at the back of the amphitheatre mostly hidden by computer and video monitors all night. The audience will have its back to them for the whole evening, and will not be applauding them despite the fact that they'll be working harder than any four musicians at any given time. We think this is a darned shame. Please stop by and tell them you love them.

■ Behind The Scenes

DOUG WELLINGTON is an electronic musician based in Tucson. He carried the majority of the logistical planning and expense of Different Skies 2003, providing a PA system, mixer, recording system, and video projection hardware for the event, and was instrumental in setting up the festival's business model and providing early promotion around Arizona. He also set up and (with **Greg Waltzer's** help) populated our website, at www.differentskies.com. This year Doug returns as mix engineer and performer, sharing behind-the-console duties with other performers so he'll have a chance to actually play something for once. He will also be providing, as was the case last year, a stiff shot of Zen calm so **Metlay** doesn't suffer an aneurysm before showtime.

STEVE WHITELEY is new to this year's roster but not to Different Skies; he drove all night from Los Angeles to Arcosanti to see last year's show. This year, Steve's loyalty has been rewarded with an intern's position at Different Skies, allowing him to do a great deal of work for essentially no credit at all. The audience may see him working at the mixing console, at the video station, behind the counter selling CDs, or on stage making noise here and there.

JEFF KUNZELMAN is our technical assistant at Arcosanti, and has provided everything from poster art to a live webcast of the event for both years. You can learn about his various artistic exploits at www.kunzelmedia.com, and purchase your own copy of his beautiful poster for this year's show at the CD sales table.

■ Thank You

...to all of this year's artists and staffers, to **Dr. Soleri, Mary Hoadley, Kelli Huth, Gin Harrison**, and the many friendly and helpful people of Arcosanti who have made us so welcome, and to you for coming out and sharing tonight with us.

As we say in Atomic City: Best wishes for a bright tomorrow!