

## Creating Dreamscapes

On May 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 I presented, for the second time, projected video artworks that were accompanied by the Lamont Wind Ensemble in Gates Concert Hall at the University of Denver. I created the video for this production in correlation to *Dreamscapes*, a collection of music by composer Martin Ellerby. His work is cast in four movements titled: *El Dorado*, *Avalon*, *Shangri-La*, and *Xanadu*. Each movement evokes various imagined cities associated with literature, mythology and history.

Upon approaching production of the videos, I researched the stories of the lost cities. In brief, *El Dorado* is a legendary city abounding in gold believed to exist in South America. *Avalon* is the place King Arthur goes after death. *Shangri-La* is a Tibetan utopia from James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* and is also a word to describe an earthly paradise. Finally *Xanadu*, an ancient city in South East Mongolia, inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge to write his great poem *Kubla Khan* which caused Xanadu to become a metaphor for opulence.

I also thoroughly and repeatedly listened to a recorded version of *Dreamscapes*, which allowed me to connect with the composers interpretations of the mythologies and helped me to develop a specific style for each of the pieces. In response to the music, I wrote words that describe possible themes, for example *El Dorado* - soaring, *Avalon* - requiem, *Shangri-La* - twirling, and *Xanadu* - dark.

Joe Martin, who would be conducting the Lamont Wind Ensemble in *Dreamscapes*, had gathered a variety of art books. I sorted through the books with him and decide on images that were appropriate for the various pieces. Those selections were scanned into digital images that I could then animate in Vegas Video. I focused primarily on established art with the intent of emphasizing its connection with the traditional music.

After organizing the images onto my hard drive, I began to look for additional resources. *El Dorado*, I imagined, was a dream-like search for a city of gold. I recalled in my dreams the ability to fly, and so I began to look for video that would represent flying over South America and evoke the search the lost city. At first I combed the Internet, I then quickly tried to learn Bryce, a 3D motion graphics software, but there was not enough time to learn the program, create the right video, and then render it all before the show. Next I tried a Nintendo 64 game called *Pilot Wings*, but the screen was filled with simulated devices and gauges. Then I discovered the best idea yet, which was to use the satellite mapping abilities of Google Earth to create the video of actually soaring over South America. In my research also found a few image resources on the web that I used as well.

Vegas Video is the main tool I use to manipulate video. For this project, in addition to Vegas, I decided to integrate Resolume into the creation process for specifically *Xanadu*. This movement really stands out from the others because the sound is outrageous and highly charged. To integrate Resolume I first animated an image in Vegas by

using the pan/crop and keyframes tools then, in Resolume I affected the video with puzzle, mirror and kaleidoscope effects. For Shangra-La, the most technical piece, I thoroughly explored the theme of mandalas. This piece was created solely in Vegas with the use cookie cutter and pan/crop effects.

While working with digital video the quality of image and smoothness of movement is at risk because of the heavy manipulation. Often times I needed to render then re-render out clips, which can cause a loss in quality. I rendered with the progressive scan mode rather than the interlaced because I was not working with originally recorded video. Color was also a very important element in the final stages of video production. Generally, I increased the saturation and contrast of my source images for projection.

This unique opportunity to exhibit video art as part of a wind ensemble performance creates particular concerns. Although the music was performed by the book, it risked being played at variable speeds in performance. The main concern then became synchronization. In video production I could align the video with the music either broadly or specifically. For example, I could use quick transitions that specifically align with the music or slow transitions that allow for a wider range of synchronization. For the original performance on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 I used the latter, more gradual transitions. For the March show I ran the video on a DVD player. This worked adequately, but the video was more of a theatrical backdrop than a piece of art. For the May show I wanted to produce stand alone video that was more tightly synchronized with the music. In order to do this I decided to run the show using the patch programming software *Isadora*. By playing the video using a custom made program I was able to increase or decrease the speed that the movie played. In general this worked really well, except that during *Xanadu* we played the game, “speed up, now slow down, now speed up.” This issue can be address in a couple ways: 1) by adding a visual play head reader in the programs visual interface 2) controlling the device with an external midi device with a more sensitive control interface.

This unique collaboration also brought up issues of audience accessibility. My idea was to build a bridge from the music to the visuals. I wanted to allow the viewers a careful introduction to the integration of the visual medium into the ensemble’s performance platform. In order to do this, I referred to my many years of theatrical lighting experiences to maintain in my mind a sensitivity of using video as a lighting instrument. Even though I projected representational images onto a large white screen I am still very much working with light in the way of a theatrical lighting designer. The goal was to support and compliment the performance on stage with the use of video as lighting.

Overall, I have been reminded of a lesson that I have already learned time and time again. That lesson is this: think simple and be prepared. This may sound easy enough, but when you have only 5 days to produce the video, a tech heavy set up, and one very brief rehearsal, planning and preproduction are crucial. I can not overemphasize the amount of time, energy, and focus that should be used to produce and prepare for the live presentation of video art.