

Jaap Blonk
Soundtracks, Scores, Interactive Animations
Friday, March 7 at 7:30 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
Jaap Blonk In Person
Presented in Association with sfSoundSeries

Dutch artist Jaap Blonk is a self-taught composer, performer and poet who has worked since the early 1980s almost exclusively in the realm of improvised vocal performance and Dada inspired concrete poetry. Known for his powerful stage presence and exuberant approach to improvisation, Blonk has, over the years, created a rich body of original work while consistently elaborating the repertoire of seminal avant-garde poets and performers, including Antonin Artaud, Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, with his various masterful interpretations of Kurt Schwitters' epic *Ursonate* being perhaps the best known. Recently, a renewed interest in mathematics has led the artist to explore the possibilities of algorithmic composition in the creation of works which fuse music, visual animation and poetry. Appearing throughout the Bay Area in early March on an extended U.S. tour, Blonk tonight presents a very rare performance/projection program including live presentations of original graphic scores; live tracks to silent films; an interpretation of Man Ray's composition *Lautgedicht* (1924) and examples of Blonk's solo videos and "interactive animations." (Steve Polta)

Ponder Nothing (2011) by Jaap Blonk; video installation, color, sound, 19 minutes, from the maker
"Processed slow motion film of water." (Jaap Blonk)

Song for the Cubists (2010) by Jaap Blonk; digital video; color, sound, from the maker
"Processed video of a burning candle with a sound track of voice samples." (Jaap Blonk)

flababble 1 (2011) by Jaap Blonk; digital video, color, sound, from the maker
Camera: Lisette Stalenhoef

"Over the past fifteen years I have gradually developed a range of techniques based on the stereo sound possibilities of the mouth. At some point it had become so rich that I decided it was now a separate instrument, other than the voice, and I called it the Cheek Synthesizer. Obviously the stereo sound needs two microphones to be captured.

"One particular technique, a vigorous shake of the head that causes the lips and cheeks to make a 'flapping' sound, has been filmed here in slow motion, with a cheap commercial photo camera. The sound was processed separately and added afterwards.

"I hope to find the opportunity in the future to make a higher-quality documentation of the Cheek Synthesizer." (Jaap Blonk)

Rhotic (Phonetic Etude #1) (1991/2012) by Jaap Blonk; voice with projection of score
"An investigation of the possible soundings of the letter 'r'." (Jaap Blonk)

YouMe (2011) by Jaap Blonk; live animation and voice
"A short study on human relationship." (Jaap Blonk)

Forever Roses (2011) by Jaap Blonk; digital video, color, sound, from the maker
"The voice sound, slowed down sometimes almost to a stop, is augmented by virtual instrument sounds generated from the vocal by sound-to-MIDI conversion." (Jaap Blonk)

Traces of Speech (2012) by Jaap Blonk; digital video, color, sound, from the maker

“A series of drawings, originating in sound poetry notation but already rather remote from functional scores. They were converted into sound in two ways: by importing them as raw data into sound software, and by creating texts in different languages by feeding them to OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software.” (Jaap Blonk)

Live animations generated by voice sound

A recent development in Blonk’s work, and still very much a work in progress.

Frictional (Phonetic Etude #2) (1992/2012) by Jaap Blonk; voice with projection of score

“Focusing on the ‘unvoiced fricatives’, the hissing sounds.” (Jaap Blonk)

Forest-Views (1999) by Bart Vegter (1940–2011); 16mm screened as digital video, color, silent film with live score by Jaap Blonk, 17 minutes, from Jaap Blonk

Produced by Gerard Holthuis, Filmstad Producties B.V.

1. Processing noise with an algorithm produces moving structures: “cellular automatons.” These are used as a starting-point (material) for the creation of “frases” of varied length, by selecting different parts from the material in combination with color-modulation.

2. The astonishingly delicate, computer-generated *Forest-Views*, by Bart Vegter, suggests the processes not only of blossoming and decay, but also, ironically, of the chemical laboratory. The screen itself seems to sprout organic forms, like a magnified Petrie dish. (Shannon Kelly, Sundance FF ‘01)

Jaap Blonk creates a largely improvised live sound track to “Forest-Views” with mostly soft voice sound and electronic processing of those.

Lautgedicht (1924) by Man Ray (1890–1976), performed by Jaap Blonk

“Possibly mocking the German Dada sound poets (‘Lautgedicht’ is German for ‘sound poem’), this work looks like a poem that was completely crossed out. Blonk performs it with a harsh voice sound inspired by this rude act of censoring. (Jaap Blonk)

Emak-Bakia (1926) by Man Ray; 16mm, b&w, silent with an improvised sound track for voice and live electronics by Jaap Blonk, 18 minutes, print from the Museum of Modern Art Circulating Film Library

“A series of fragments, a cinempoem with a certain optical sequence make up a whole that still remains a fragment. Just as one can much better appreciate the abstract beauty in a fragment of a classic work than in its entirety, so this film tries to indicate the essentials in contemporary cinematography. It is not an ‘abstract’ film nor a story-teller; its reasons for being are its inventions of light-forms and movements, while the more objective parts interrupt the monotony of abstract inventions or serve as punctuation. Anyone who can sit through an hour’s projection of a film in which sixty per cent of the action passes in and out of doorways and in inaudible conversations, is asked to give twenty minutes of attention to a more or less logical sequence of ideas without any pretention of revolutionizing the film industry. To those who would still question ‘the reason for this extravagance’ one can simply reply by translating the title ‘emak bakia’, an old Basque expression which means ‘don’t bother me.’” (Man Ray, *Close-Up*, August 1927)

Special thanks for assistance in this program is extended to Tyler Harwood and Matt Ingalls.

This program is presented with the assistance of sfSoundGroup

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