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Media Lounge is the message

Festival of New Media's edgiest fare

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The layman's vision of the strange new world of techno-performance art will not be changed by a first visit to the Media Lounge at the Festival of New Cinema and New Media. The black metalloid space on the third floor of the Just For Laughs Museum is, we are told, "where visual and aural continua hybridize." Under the red vampire lighting of the venue, that makes even less sense than it does in print.

The New Media section of the fest is in its second year and, with a relative shoestring budget of \$150,000, organizers have invited a who's-who (and a who's-he?) of multi-media artists to expand notions of how film, music and technology interact.

This is the heart of tomorrowland, where the existential questions are asked: How does man relate to his technological universe? What do images and sounds mean? And who is the "Bubble Man?"

"Evolving" and "experimental" are the buzzwords, especially given the variety of events over a 10-day run which includes DJs, a video-audio "Mass," electroacoustic club happenings, installations, access to Internet and CD-Rom technology and something called "virtual puppeteering" (Me? No, I quit the brokerage firm; I'm a virtual puppeteer now).

That range of digitized endeavour brings a daily nightmare of troubleshooting, rewiring and ego massage.

As Lounge programming assistant Virginie Pringuet and publicist Adrien Gonzalez led the tour yesterday, musque concrète composer Michel Chion was rehearsing the evening performance of *La Messe de Terre*, a video project with live music.

Requests for interviews were turned away while Chion ran his tests - tests which involved Chion sitting behind his mixing board in the main show-room, video of street scenes accompanied by plinks from his xylophone.

Still, there is nothing to fear here; after Friday's bravura opening with DJ

electronica for a packed house, word of mouth is spreading. And organizers rightly point out how the Media Lounge upends the prevailing image of the cold cyborg face of technology as it relates to film.

Pringuet and Gonzalez draw a link between the origins of cinema, when the first movie theatres featured live musical accompaniment, and the New Media aesthetic.

The only real difference now is in the level of technology on offer; in effect, most of these performances wire

the digital synapses of the computer age to the old technology of live performance.

To that end, Tuesday's double bill features Icelandic violinist Steina Vasulka using MIDI tech-

nology to control video images, and an ambient noise project called *Symphony For Dot Matrix Printers* courtesy of The User.

On Wednesday, director Johan Grimprez and composer David Shea present *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. Inspired by two Don DeLillo novels, *White Noise* and *Mao II*, it's a pseudo-documentary exploration of "catastrophe culture."

On Thursday and Friday, *A-Live* immerses the courageous in a "psycho-sensorial" musical-video environment with baffling aims and questions best left to the punter to discover.

Admission to the Media Lounge and

its superwired computers is free, including access to a Web site under the creative direction of Robert Lepage. The performances themselves cost \$7 except for the close-

ing night with Swedish audio/video groovers Lucky People Center, which is \$10.

Free events include the Bubble Man installation, a bit of whimsy wherein Jean-Paul Labro immerses himself in an aqua-pod and creates live video images while soap bubbles float down onto the curious.

The sleeper may be Joseph Hyde's video installation, *Zoetrope*, which questions what happens in the electromagnetic netherworld when a switch is halfway between on and off. That

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Tonight's double bill: Icelandic violinist Steina Vasulka and the ambient noise project called *Symphony For Dot Matrix Printers*.