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HENRY ART GALLERY PRESENTS AELITA, A PERFORMANCE BLENDING SCIENCE FICTION FILM AND ELECTRONIC SYNTHESIZER FROM THE 1920S

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In conjunction with this summer's exhibition Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932 the Henry will present the famed 1924 Soviet silent, science fiction film Aelita accompanied by the world premiere of a live musical score featuring the 1920 electronic instrument the Theremin, a Russian invention. The performance will be held on Saturday, August 4, at 8:00 pm Roethke Auditorium in Kane Hall (Room 130) on the University of Washington campus. Directed by the innovative Russian film maker Yakov Protazanov, the film showcases Constructivist stylization in its theatrical settings and costumes by Aleksandra Exter and Isaac Ratinovich.

Aelita is the story of an engineer named Los who, tired of earthly miseries, and pursued for the murder of his wife, escapes to Mars on a flying machine of his own invention, accompanied by the detective investigating the murder and a good-hearted Red Army soldier. On Mars Los falls in love with the planet's ruler Aelita but is also imprisoned, enslaved, and involved in a revolution. In the end he is relieved to find that it has all been a dream - that he is safely back on his own formerly despised planet.

The film's musical accompaniment, composed by Dennis James, offers a rare opportunity to see the Theremin performed. The instrument is played by passing the hands over the instrument without touching it. The Theremin's two antennae actually respond to all body movements. Therefore, it is necessary for the player to exert firm control over his body and head motions as well as his hand motions. The ability to stand motionless is absolutely essential. The thereminist must move his hands with incredible precision as well as speed if he wishes to play distinct notes with correct intonation.

The Theremin was invented by a young Russian physicist Leon Theremin (Lev Sergevitch Termen) in 1920. He was the first to harness the new technology of electronics for creating music. During the 1920s Theremin's performances drew standing room crowds throughout Europe and the United States at concerts with such renowned orchestras as the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. In 1929, Theremin licensed the Radio Corporation of America to manufacture the instrument. Although RCA produced a solidly-built instrument with good tone color, it was, simply put, hard to play and not a commercial success.

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Exhibition Schedule

Awards in the Visual Arts 8
January 19 - March 4, 1990

Thomas Hart Benton:
Drawing from Life
March 16 - May 6, 1990

Art Into Life:
Russian Constructivism 1914-1932
July 4 - September 2, 1990

Myth of the West
September 14 - December 2, 1990

Waves and Plagues:
The Art of Masami Teraoka
December 12, 1990 - February 3, 1991

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Leon Theremin remained in the United States for about ten years. During his stay he developed several musical instruments based on the beat frequency oscillator principle. In addition to the Theremin, he built keyboard and finger controlled solo instruments, the terpsitone dance platform, the keyboard electronic tympani, and a keyboard controlled complex rhythmic pattern generator. He also experimented with visual displays, including rotating discs illuminated with stroboscopic lights. Theremin's experiences laid much of the groundwork for subsequent developments which led to many of the electronic musical instruments which are in use today. Theremin returned to his native Russia around 1938. He continues, as of 1987, to do research in electronic musical instruments and acoustics at the University of Moscow.

Dennis James is renowned for his work in music history and authentic performance practice. He has played a pivotal role in the revival of silent films with live music. He has performed with major symphony orchestras both throughout the nation and abroad. James has several record albums to his credit and has been the subject of national television and radio broadcasts.

For Aelita, James has composed a score in which his performance on the Theremin is accompanied by two additional musicians on the piano, electric violin and synthesizer.

Tickets are \$8.00 general admission, \$6.00 for students and Henry Gallery members. For additional information or to order tickets with a credit card please call (206) 543-2281 during business hours.

Presentation of Aelita is supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and Seafirst Bank.

Black and white film stills and press photographs of Dennis James playing the Theremin are available. For additional materials on Aelita or on the exhibition Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932 please call Claudia Bach, Public Information Director at (206) 543-2281.

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