"avex rave '94" - a pioneering event

Although this information is a little old, I would like to report on an impressive event, the first of its kind, which occurred on August 29, 1994.

This was a large-scale concert/disco event sponsored by "avex trax", the parent company of "Velfarre" which is being featured in this issue's review. "avex trax" collected 15 groups of musicians from Europe, America and Japan who have released CDs and records under its label and held an event costing 500-million yen (not including the "Hi-Vision" systems used) at the "Tokyo Dome" stadium which accommodates 50,000 people. A live event of this scale is the second after one held in the summer of 1993. Like the previous event, free admission was offered to those holding tickets which had been attached to event-related CDs.

It is rare that such a large-scale event has free admission. The impressive contents of this second time were realtime transmission (closed circuit) of Hi Vision 3D images and 4-channel surround sound by the use of live broadcast using multiple satellite circuits (4 circuits) between special venues set up in the major Japanese cities of Sapporo, Nagoya, Osaka and Fukuoka. This link-up gave the audience a live feeling as if they were in the Tokyo Dome stadium by the use of 4-channel surround PA equipment and 3D images projected upon multiple gigantic screens.

Over the three and a half hours of performances, interspersed with breaks for the DJs, there were performances by well-known European and American artists: Cappella, Bananrama, The Prodigy, 2 Unlimited, Praga Chan, Urban Cookie Collective as well as techno-house artists and Japanese house label musicians such as "trf" and "mc A.T." in a non-stop disco live event totalling 15 artists/groups. This disco/live event was like having a disco space expanded into a gigantic area, using more lighting equipment than normal -- several moving lights like Vari-Lite, several laser display systems, and more PA systems (amplified low band) than the usual concert. In addition to a large stage just like those for large concerts, a large structure called "Super Mountain" (see photo) was built upon which 500 ladies specially selected for their shocking attire danced non-stop. Of course, those in the arena who could not make it onto the "Super Mountain" danced at the 2nd and 3rd floor seats closer to the similarly attired 50,000 audience who were experiencing this gigantic disco.

As the world's first trial, the realtime transmission of 3D images using Hi-Vision systems called "avex rave '94 Hi-Vision 3D Realtime Experience" was "the concept of sublimating new media technology into entertainment using avex's own methods in a software approach in order to construct a new media". The event, being the first trial of a number of concepts, gained the support of the Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, Hi Vision Promotion Association Inc., and Hi-Vision Promotion Center.

The 15 Hi-Vision cameras (from among which 5 pairs for 3D use were mounted on 3D tripods -- 4 of the 5 pairs had zoom functions) placed in the main venue, Tokyo Dome, and the specially designed switcher allowed projection onto gigantic displays (using 6 sets of Jumbotron and Moobtron 300 inch class displays) at each site, recording for Broadcast Satellite transmission (using 7 sets of Nippon Broadcasting Corporation's post on-air high definition TV VTR) recording for video packages and CD-ROMs (using 9 sets of NTSC VTR), and transmission to SNV (3 Earth Station Vehicle satellite up-link carrier stations) for satellite (Super Bird A) broadcast (2 MUSE systems for 2 channel broadband compression for 2 channels and digital coding). The audio was 8 groups of 4-channel output (joystick control) surround sound newly developed with the technical cooperation of the "Hi-Vision 3D Committee" to allow 4-channel surround sound reconfiguration at each relay point by communications satellite

and Hi-Vision A mode "DANCE" system's high positioning transmission using digital audio compression.

The 3D images and surround sound uplinked (only the Tokyo-Osaka link was in digital code, the other links were MUSE links) from Tokyo Dome were downlinked via local TV stations and Nippon Telegraph & Telephone Corporation's mobile satellite broadcast receiving stations to the disco "King XMHU" (Sapporo), disco "King & Queen" (Nagoya), special arena "Twin 21" (Osaka), and disco "Maria Club" (Fukuoka) and reproduced by 30 Hi-Vision projectors on 11 3D screens (3 screens in Sapporo, 2 in Nagoya, 3 in Osaka, and 3 in Fukuoka). These images were processed using polarized 3D imaging, so people wore polarized glasses to get the 3D sensation. Using these sensory systems, a total of 60,000 people were able to get a realtime experience of this event.

The event this time was not simply a gigantic disco event. It rewrote the past concept of "events" because it: (1) confirmed the possible applications of Hi-Vision systems in a "participatory" event through sensations of presence (at the site) and simultaneity by the revolutionary application of state-of-the-art technologies at the practical level, and (2) it showed the splendid capabilities of one source multimedia which can be reused for broadcast satellite, video package, CD-ROM and other media. Also, the stance of the private enterprise called "avex trax", which made this event possible, attracted much praise. It is hoped that a further evolved event will be held next year.

This event used advanced systems which, at first glance, may appear to have no relation to existing discos and persons involved in the disco industry. It was an event which left its impact on the history of "events" and "broadcasting", and gave hints about various possibilities. First, that a dance record lable was able to conduct this event based on governmental support (Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, etc.). Second, that an event of this size could be conducted without taking any entrance fees (even though people had to purchase CDs to get the entrance tickets, the entrance fee amount was free-of-charge). It must also be noted that there was outside cooperation/support, broadcast program license fees and video materials sales, and immense promotional effects involved. Third, that it is possible to obtain sensations of being present (at the site) and of simultaneity at multiple sites by realtime transmission to remote sites of high-quality images and sound as exemplified by Hi-Vision (Japan is currently proceeding with the practical application of B-ISDN). And with the possible evolution of multimedia for various events, it left sufficient room for thought regarding the development of various media for discos.

The character and image of discos differ with each country, but they all have in common the necessity for one to actually go in order to enjoy this special space. In this regard, there is sufficient recognition of the existence of such spaces called "discos" even as the times change. One cannot say that discos (and concert arenas) which exist within such virtual reality worlds, such as in "Total Recall" will not appear in the future. The "avex rave '94" provided sufficient indications of these possibilities. For these to become ordinarily-used systems, not for events, would be a difficult problem, but I am certain they will become actualized as technology evolves in the future.

Facing this new era, not only the various hardware for performances such as audio, lighting, interior, etc., but also originality of the software aspect such as DJs and artists is necessary in order for the spaces called "discos" to become feasible. It is necessary to enhance the uniqueness of the spaces called "discos". Without these difficulties to overcome, attrition by natural selection will be inevitable. This tendency is extremely strong in Japan, as in the example of theatrical movies being ousted by rental home videos. Rather than the sensations enjoyed in theaters (the sensation of presence, including sound, provided by a gigantic screen and surround sound), an extremely large segment of the population have selected the comfort of viewing movies at home,

as represented by the term "couch potato". The energy and objectives of people visiting movie theaters and discos may differ, but it is conceivable that this cannot be said any longer as environments for entertainment evolve. It is you, the reader who was influenced by this report, who will be able to survive this new era.