



MusicVR Episode 1 'Tres Lunas' by Mike Oldfield

MusicVR was first conceived by **Mike Oldfield** back in the early 90's. Since then it has progressed through many stages to now finally arrive in a form that many home computers can play.

When it started it was necessary to have computers the size of fridges (with a suitably large price tag) to run even a basic version of the game. The only way for people to play the game was on this huge 'super computer'. **Mike** toyed with the idea of taking this computer on tour so that many more people could enjoy the experience, but for one reason or another it never happened.

In the last few years computer graphics have been advancing at such a rate that home computers are many times faster than the original computer that **Mike** used. So he has decided to make the game available to a much wider audience.....

You may be asking why does **MusicVR** need computers that are so powerful? Well, the answer lies mainly in 'freedom'. Most of us are aware of the amazing computer graphics that we see on films and television but this is very different from the world of **MusicVR**. Film and Television computer graphics are all known as 'Pre-Rendered'. This means that everything that you see has been thought out previously (Pre) and then the computer gets the task of making each separate frame of the film (Rendered). Much in the same way as traditional animation all of these frames are then played one after the other and the animation unrolls in front of us. The advantage with this method is that it doesn't matter how long the computer takes to make each frame, as we will simply play them all back at the end. The disadvantage with this is that if you decide that you want to change where you go in the film the whole sequence has to be built from scratch. This is where **MusicVR** comes in....

MusicVR relies on the computer being able to make each frame of the animation in a fraction of a second. If you can make the computer so fast that it makes 30 or even 60 of these frames a second then you could actually decide in 'real-time' where you wanted to go and hence change the animation as you go. This is what **Mike** wanted so that playing **MusicVR** is really more like exploring his world because you have the freedom to travel where you like – hence the name of Music Virtual Reality.

As there has not been anything quite like **MusicVR** with its mixture of imaginative images and music before, **Mike** had to have the software specially written. He got together a team of people to help him both write the new software and make everything in his world. He has decided at every step of the way how the software should look and work and what it should and shouldn't do. Each part of the world is carefully made on the computers so that it does not slow the final world down. If a part of the world is too complicated then everything slows down and the illusion of a virtual world is lost.

Obviously there are computer games available that seem to have this type of freedom, but most, such as racing games keep you on a very narrowly defined path or area. None have come close to the mix of music and experience. Other computer games are very much goal orientated, whether it is to kill all the enemy, or score the most goals, again **MusicVR** is not about finishing the game, nor is it violent, it is about enjoying the music, the visuals and the experience.

Not content with only one person being able to play the game, **Mike** wanted for people to be able to link their games. He has done this with things called Avatars. An avatar is an object in the game such as a humming bird or a butterfly. They can be as varied as an airship or a firebeing and there are 13 of them in total. You don't need to have an avatar to play the game but if you are connected to the internet then you can link your game of **MusicVR** to another. Once linked you can see other avatars moving around the game. With the aid of a mobile phone, you could also talk to your friend then meet up and go and explore together. Or if one person is a novice then they could be helped to find their way around. There is also a section on www.mikeoldfield.com where people can post information about their game enabling them to share a game with someone completely different who could be across the other side of the world. This also gives the game an element of randomness as you don't know what other avatars will do. As there are only 13 avatars per game you can join a game without being an avatar, just as an observer. When an avatar becomes available you can take it and join in.

Mike has used computer technology with his music to make a highly imaginative world that you can explore and experience. As you look around the world things change depending on what you do. As you fly around the central desert area then the music changes depending on where you have been and what things you have found. For instance there are rings that are placed around the world, by collecting these it opens up new areas that you can go and explore. Sometimes you will be helped – there is a bird that takes you out to an island at sea if you have enough rings. It is not necessary to collect the rings, but it is one way of enjoying it.

We have found that in making **MusicVR** it is very difficult to describe it. When people do finally get to see the game they usually respond with 'ah this is what you mean' If left to play the game then they usually develop the **MusicVR** chuckle as **Mike** calls it – as they fly around, explore and get the hang of it, people tend to chuckle.

The only way to experience it is to have a go. **MusicVR** is to be released as a double CD with **Mike's** latest album 'Tres Lunas' The cd contains a free demo and the installer for the full game which requires an online payment of £11.75. Both of these can also be downloaded from his site, www.mikeoldfield.com.



Tr3s Lunas Mike Oldfield