

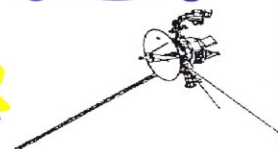
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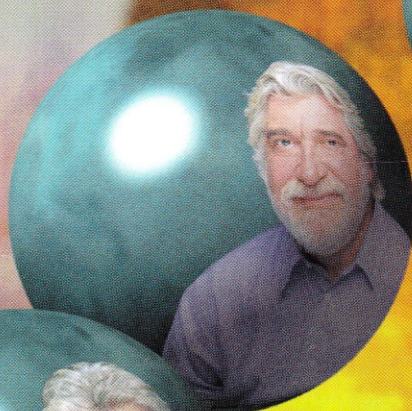
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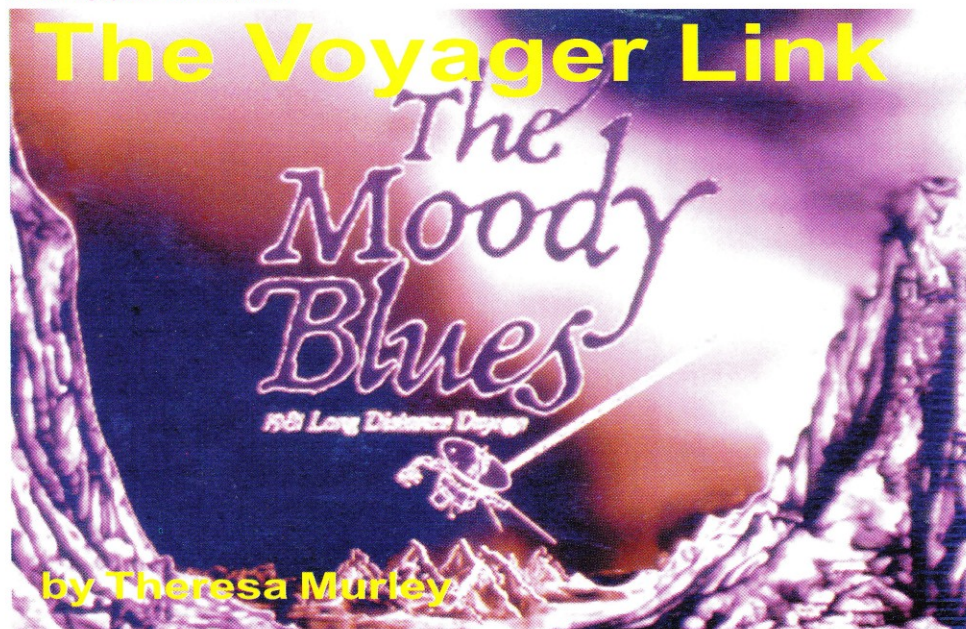


The Moody Blues Magazine™



In This Issue:

The Making of Strange Times



Factor two

Another character figures prominently in this story: Alan Ames. Already a fan, Alan first saw the Moodies in 1969 in southern California when they opened for a band named Spirit and premiered *Days of Future Passed*. "To me their music epitomized the ultimate, finer aspects of man's search for himself, for who we are and what we're doing in the universe," said Alan. "Of course in the 1969, 70, 71 era, those were very dominant questions among the alternative west coast lifestyle."

Alan went on to become an independent television and concert producer/director and, in 1979, a partner in a company called Voyager Image. Voyager Image was given the rights (through the public information office by Frank Bristo of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory) to be part of the live image retrieval network during the close encounter fly-bys of the Voyager I and II missions. "We had our own office suite with our own system where we recorded on videotape and on film the RAMTEK information coming from the Voyager spacecraft," said Alan. "In May and June of 1979 it was the fly-by of Jupiter." The information was retrieved live, in black and white format, then put through a nine-color filter separation, based on Voyager data, to recreate the live images in color. "We were there to retrieve that as a private sector organization and make the information available to the general public through a series of projects," said Alan.

It was through one of these projects that Alan met Jim Dilettoso, who was at the Jet Propulsion Lab on behalf of Nippon Television. By then, Jim's tour production company, Starship Enterprises, was doing sound and visuals for such clients as The Pointer Sisters, Three Dog Night, Pink Floyd, and Management 3, the Moody's own tour agent. "Our tour technology was considered very innovative," said Jim. "We were experimenting with computer-controlled lighting." It was around this time that Jim pitched a new idea to Alan: The Earth Space Expo.

Jim had developed this concept a few years earlier and wanted to see it realized. The goal was to combine information and entertainment with scientific discoveries and space exploration. Jim and Alan found they had much in common. Said Alan, "I was at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Here we were with SETI [Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence]. We suddenly had this amazing merger of science meeting art and entertainment — 'Info-tainment' — to educate as well as entertain society through our projects. [It was] not just entertainment for entertainment value."

The pair envisioned a combination of actual and animated space scenes with audio and visual effects set to live music. "We had endless conversations regarding Pink Floyd,

Today, the marriage of computer graphics with live concert performances is routine. Eighteen years ago, it was practically unheard of — unless you were attending a Moody Blues concert. Here's the inside story on Alan Ames and Jim Dilettoso, the duo who successfully docked the Moodies with space age concert graphics and effects.

As the Voyager spacecraft was drifting across the solar system in the early '80s, its mirror image wafted across the cover of the Moodies' *Long Distance Voyager* album, and on to *The Present's* album cover and inside gatefold.

The merging of Moodies imageries with the drama and goals of the Voyager mission was a logical match, but it wasn't the original intent. In 1981, Justin Hayward told *Melody Maker* magazine that the band's ninth album was going "back to having a bit of rock 'n' roll fun and putting on a good show without the messages." Later Justin told *H&H* [see issue #31, *LDV* retrospective] that he discovered the old engraving print in a photo shop and thought, "Ah, that would make a great album sleeve. But, of course, we'd got this spacey thing to work with, a Voyager spacecraft."

Somewhere during the *Long Distance Voyager's* March 1980 to April 1981 gestation, the Voyager spacecraft eased into the picture and album title. How did it get there?

A voice from the past

The story begins in the early '70s with band producer and UFO enthusiast, Jim Dilettoso. "All through the '60s and '70s I had been playing [keyboard] in bands, producing bands, promoting concerts," said Jim. By the mid to late '70s he was producing acts like Orleans, Pure Prairie League, and Todd Rundgren. A tireless entrepreneur, Jim owned several companies, one of them, Starship Enterprises, had also been involved with developing the world's first digital music synthesizer. "So I had a lot to talk about with Michael Pinder," said Jim.

Jim was already a Moody Blues fan from the '60s. "But I got more involved when Emily Rainbow Touraine introduced me to Michael Pinder in the late '70s," he said. "[The Moodies] knew her as 'Rainbow' when she was Jimmy Hendrix' friend." Jim Dilettoso and Mike Pinder's acquaintance grew as they ran into each other at various functions. Jim remembers visiting Pinder at Indigo Ranch in Malibu: "The Voyager recordings were underway," said Jim. "Michael was not recording with the band. He decided not to do that. He said that perhaps he would overdub, but [instead] decided to leave the band and move to Hawaii. In fact, he made that decision while I was visiting him in Malibu."

Tangerine Dream, Ambrosia, and other groups at the time who were creating music of a similar genre," said Alan. "In this case we were certain that the Moodies were the proper group to really take this to the next step." They wanted the Moodies to play at their Expo events.

Enter Moody Blues

Jim asked Mike Pinder for input. "He liked the paranormal research that we were involved in — the UFO research, the aerospace and NASA aspects," said Jim. "Pinder thought it was a good idea for us to get with [Moodies tour manager] Peter Jackson." Jim's first meetings with Pete were on the road. He showed Peter a demo tape; a series of Voyager and animated space shots set to classical music. It was spring 1979. "It sounds pretty interesting," Peter told Jim. "We'll meet at my office some months down the road."

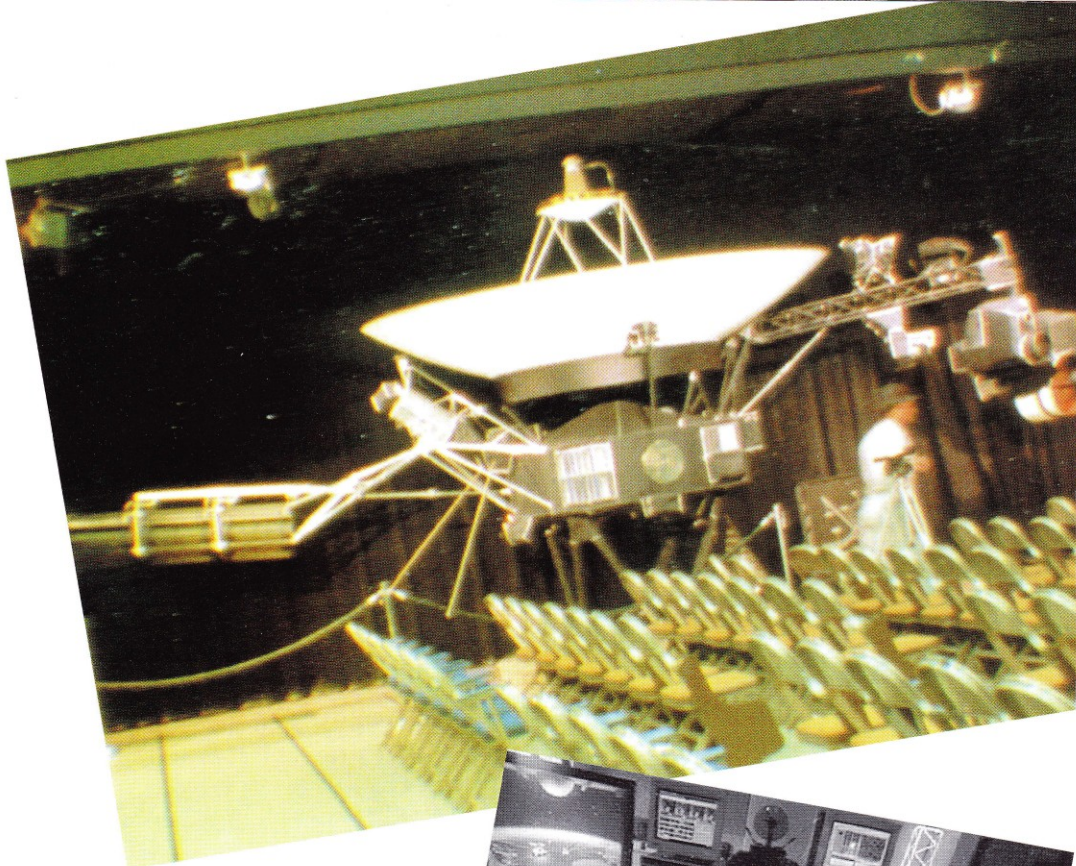
Jim continues. "Then I met Alan, and had another talk with Michael Pinder, so I knew we had to make a good showing. We knew that the band was going to have some new members. Fortunately, I had had contact with Patrick Moraz in the earlier synthesizer days, when I was building those. So we had a lot of faces around that knew us or knew of us."

Meanwhile, Jim had received an invitation to coordinate a large presentation called America's Salute to the Astronauts—The 10th Anniversary of Landing on the Moon. This week-long event occurred in August of 1979 at the Dunes Hotel in Las Vegas. The festivities concluded with a \$1000-a-plate dinner to benefit the National Space Institute. Some 1500 guests were treated to performances by Glen Campbell, Wayne Newton, Diana Ross, Charo, Liberace, and more, each taking a turn to dedicate a song to the honored astronauts seated in the front row. John Denver and Hugh Downs were also there as they were the chairmen of the National Space Institute. Because John Denver was there, so was his manager, Jerry Weintraub of Management 3.

Said Jim Dilettoso, "Alan pre-produced this beautiful tapestry of Voyager images on video and multi-media and we had a satellite downlink from the roof of the hotel that put the images of Voyager live up onto the screen while the musicians were performing. Now, at this point, the fact that we were using computers and computer animation, and doing video to make presentations was considered very stimulating. This was two years before MTV was created. It was state-of-the-art at the time."

But for Alan and Jim, the capstone of the event was the presentation of the 7 1/2 minute Earth Space Expo prototype; a composite piece of Voyager and animated space scenes, only *this* time set to the music of The Moody Blues.

It began with the narrative, "Blasting,



Facing page: Alan Ames' original computer graphic of Voyager landing on Jupiter. Above: The Voyager spacecraft mock-up, on loan to the Moodies from NASA/JPL. Right: Jim Dilettoso at one of the eight computer animation bays at Village Labs.

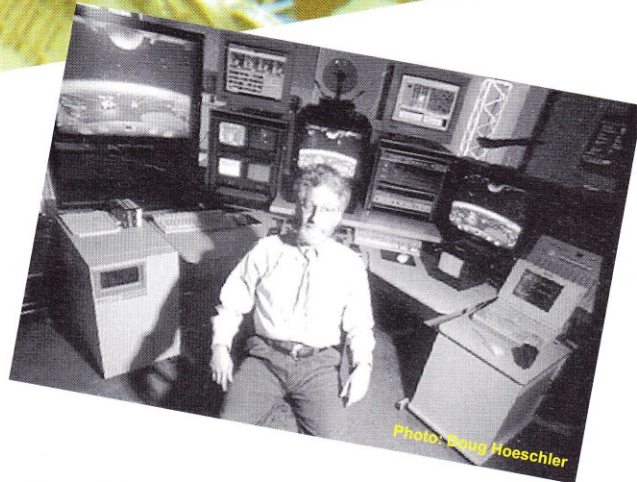


Photo: Doug Hoeschler

billowing, bursting forth with the power of 10 billion butterfly sneezes," and continued through Graeme's poem and song. Then came Ray's voice: "Ah, listen, here he comes..." from "Eternity Road." Recalls Alan: "As Ray sang, 'turning, spinning, catherine wheeling...' that was the original first color composite of Jupiter spinning around." After a bit, the music transitioned to Justin singing, "Something there outside, says we're lonely..." from 'Candle of Life,' and wound down with the song's phrase, "So love everybody and make them your friend."

Said Alan: "That's where the first public performance of any Moody Blues crossover Voyager concept occurred, in front of those 1500 people, including the Weintraub/Management 3 people. It received a phenomenal response and ovation."

With this success behind them, Jim and Alan made a presentation to Peter Jackson and Dave Furano of Management 3. "Peter said, 'This all makes [artistic] sense, but it's got to make business sense, too,'" quotes Jim. "And

the job then became convincing them that if the [Earth Expo] tour was called 'Voyager'...we knew that a year down the road, Voyager would be in every magazine all over the world for sending back these pictures, that the Moody Blues and their affiliation with Voyager would hit at the very same time. We proposed that we could get from NASA, a 15-foot plastic model of Voyager and hang it from the scoreboard; that Alan could produce the computer graphics and animation; and that with our logistical experience as a touring and sound company, we could mount something in our arena that would work for them.

"Then Dave Furano left [Management 3] and a couple of weeks later we had to do it all over again to Tom Hulett. By this time there was paperwork circulating all over Management 3 that was 'Moody Blues — The Voyager Project,'" said Jim. "Tom had to think about it. Remember that we were proposing that the band, with a new album, with a new player, should come and play in *our* touring event called Earth Space Expo."

Tom Hulett made a counter offer: that Jim and Alan become part of the *Moody Blues'* touring operation. Recalls Jim: "Hulett loved the concept. He hired us to produce the visuals, to get the materials." Jim and Alan became the Moody's tour production consultants supplying paperwork, designs, and blueprints to Tom Hulett. They subcontracted the logistics of audio to Claire Brothers, and lighting to Bob O'Neil of Obie Lights.

"Fortunately we all got along very well, and we were able to help Tom," said Jim. "Meanwhile, Michael Pinder was helping me. Even though Michael was no longer in the band, he had given me some good information about dealing with them—the personalities—and their interest in UFOs."

The first show

Working from a distance, and only in contact with Tom Hulett and Jason Raphalean of Management 3; Alan and Jim planned and coordinated all aspects of tour production. They arrived in Seattle, the first stop on the Moodies' *LDV* tour, a few days early to meet with Bob O'Neil. Bob, Tom, and Jason were the only people who knew Alan and Jim. So it wasn't until the first day of the *LDV* tour that Jim and Alan met anybody in the band. "And of course the band's crew, from Mike Keys to Mother to Doug Lock, were wondering who the heck we were!" said Jim.

Over the weeks ahead, the road crew's curiosity about Jim and Alan grew. "A couple times Justin came to my defense when people were saying, 'Well, who are these guys and what are they doing here?'" So I appreciated that in Justin," remembers Jim.

Early on the day of the first show, Alan and Jim went to the arena. They still hadn't edited the film and visuals to match the music for the opening audio-visual presentation. This because, rather than use music from previous albums, they were going to edit in music from the *LDV* album. "Passes were ready for us, as was a little secret editing room," said Jim. "We walked into the building about three or four hours before the show, and there was a bomb scare. Everybody had to leave the building. Alan and I did not leave the building."

Alan continues the story, "We had been given a tape of the first three songs—the mini set that we'd worked on—to be the first part of that evening's show. And we had to play the music back and edit the visuals to the actual length of the song "Gemini Dream," which was the big opener. So while the bomb scare was going on, they were evacuating the area, and they had these German Shepherd dogs combing the seats, we stayed in and completed cutting the very first music video for that show that night, and actually got it rigged, literally, minutes before the show went on!"

Images from the 16mm film, not videotape, were projected on a screen behind the band members as they played the six opening numbers. "It worked flawlessly," said Jim. "I sat in the closest seat I could find and watched the first part of the show, then went backstage to have a meeting with Tom Hulett about what other visuals we were going to make and add. And that became the way things went for a number of years: meeting with Tom Hulett backstage at some tour and discussing concept and philosophy of visuals and design, and logistics for making the tour more compact."

A few hitches

During the first show, the screen was rigged perfectly upright. But by the second show, there was some problem with the pulleys, causing the top of the screen to lean backwards. "It must have been serendipity or an omen for the screen to be leaning back by about 10 degrees," said Jim. "Not only did it make it easier for the projector to beam down and hit the screen at that angle, but now it was at a better angle for everyone in the audience to see, and it remained that way for the rest of the tour."

Alan recalls that Jimmy Spheres opened for that tour. "One night, he had finished his performance and it was in the break between Jimmy and the Moodies coming on that Bob O'Neil skirted up the catwalk with a little belay line attached to him in case he fell, and crawled into the position to where the projector had already been set, and loaded the film. This you would never ever do in a million years! You would load the film in the

projector and then hoist the projector up. That night we had to do it backwards and I tell you, Bob took his life in his hands, just moments before the band took the stage. God was definitely on our side for that show."

There were two Voyager spacecraft models suspended from the rafters. "The first one...I was able to get the Public Information Office to loan that for a couple of shows," said Jim. "But it was kind of fragile. It was made to be in the Von Karman Auditorium. Obie's lighting company subcontracted another one to be built which I think was done by a scenery shop in Burbank, I'm not sure. I think that was abandoned after a few shows." Alan, too, heard that the second model couldn't withstand the rigors of touring.

Subsequent projects

Jim and Alan remained tour consultants to Tom Hulett for *The Present* and *Keys of the Kingdom* album tours. Their last consulting job for The Moodies was the symphony orchestra tour. "Alan and I designed...and did all the paperwork and planning for the symphony orchestra tour," said Jim. "Right down to the details...how to Velcro the [microphone] contacts onto their violins and not be worried that it would ruin them."

Alan brought particular experience to the symphony tour. Before the Voyager involvement, he worked with Ron Hayes of Ron Hayes Music Image in Hollywood. "We came up with "The Astonishing Odyssey," later known as "Music From Outer Space Concerts," or the "Star Wars Concerts." We did a series of large scale events at the Hollywood Bowl, Anaheim Stadium, Montreal Olympic Stadium

Right: Backstage with John Lodge.
Left to right: Michael Tanner, John, Jim Dilettoso, Susan Gordon. Facing page: Top: Alan Ames with twin gold records awarded for Long Distance Voyager. Bottom: Jim Dilettoso with his backstage pass collection. Jim is pointing to a pass for the Moodies' Keys of the Kingdom tour.



and so on, with 120-piece orchestras. And we would have Zubin Meta or Michelle LeGrand, or Michael Tilson Thomas conduct. Then we'd bring out Orson Welles, Louis Jordan, William Shatner, or David Hemmings, to narrate from Arthur C. Clarke's 'Childhood's End,' [for example].

"At this period, the mid to late '70s, we were the first large-scale touring, multi-media, laser light show, computer animation, graphics, film, playback, event of its time," said Alan. These services not only first attracted Jim Dilettoso to enlist Alan's help, but also came in handy some 15 years later when the Moodies embarked on their orchestral tour. "We had worked with orchestras and knew the nuances of the timing differentials and having a band playing with an orchestra. [We also knew how to have] a conductor linking the two and having to link the visual to the live music. Because, of course, in a live event, and especially with a live orchestra, they'll play the music maybe a little faster, a little slower, the next night, but the visuals were a finite element, they were cut," said Alan. "And that's what we then brought together for the symphony concept that was delivered to Management 3."

"I think we started the paperwork in 1986 and continued through '88," adds Jim. The duo provided the information to the Moodies' management, then went on to other projects.

Jim moved from tour production into computer graphics, animation, and digital audio production. Jim's computer graphics lab merged with Georgie Hormel's Village Recorder (home of Steely Dan, Supertramp, Fleetwood Mac, Tom Petty, The Eagles and others) and became Village Labs, an audio/video, design/engineering firm in Arizona. Alan moved to Texas where he currently is owner/operator of an independent TV/entertainment consulting firm, and is a faculty member for the Art Institute of Houston in the School of Media Arts.

Moody memories

Jim and Alan met many bands through their work. "In the limited and awkward way I got to know them over the years, I came to enjoy them and their music more than any of the others," said Jim of the Moodies. "I came to enjoy Graeme and Ray, and our fun times after the shows. Ray was always trying to get me to sing correctly. I have a one-note range, I can sing just wonderful inside of those two notes. Ray and Graeme were certainly nocturnal. They liked to visit with other people. A few times I found myself in a room of fans with Ray and Graeme until all hours of the morning...just visiting. I know there are a lot of legends, [but] there was far less contraband at Moody Blues tours than any other bands that I've produced tours of.

"It seemed to me that John and Justin



were always very concerned about their health and what they consumed — food and everything. "I developed a high degree of respect for the way John and Justin regularly dealt with the fans backstage. Their tireless approach to seeing people.

"I enjoy a time-or-two a year dialogue with John Lodge. John is always asking me for the UFO TV programs that I produce and I'm in. Over the years, that seems to be an ongoing interest on his part. I felt that they always managed that in a very intelligent way — as optimists and skeptics at the same time. You know, being known as a UFO investigator, which is over the years what has happened to me, I meet thousands of people with UFO stories and legends that the band has had sightings. I think [the band] manages those legends in a quality way, never seeming fanatic about it."

Jim has also kept up with Mike Pinder, as Mike has been to Village Labs in Arizona and done workshops there. He has a video tape out titled "Conversation with Michael Pinder at Village Labs" available through One Step Records. Even Bias Boshell, touring musician

with the Moodies, has spent a week at Village Labs learning about computer graphics equipment.

Final tribute

Interesting how an untitled album, a NASA lab half-a-world away, and the state-of-the-art technical talents of two Americans came together in time. But the Moodies have a way of attracting the right people, even the right ideas, to their endeavors. Alan Ames puts that attraction well: "There was redeeming value here. I felt that this band would be known...as an organization that kind of stopped the world in its tracks, pointed them in a direction, and then continued to midwife the development of these different levels of awareness that we're now taking pretty much for granted as we head into this new millennium."

H&H thanks Moodies fan Alicia Eignus, a student in Alan Ames' class, for making this article possible.

