



Personal computers have the potential to be powerful collaboration tools in performance art. They can be used to generate interactive backdrops, or to create virtual characters that can interact with the performer, even if in a limited way.

In 1979, when I got my first personal computer, what fascinated me was the possibility that computers could create the visual equivalent of musical instruments by performing in real time. In 1997, I designed CyberVato Performance Instrument for Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes for "Mexterminator," an interactive performance piece that was presented in San Francisco. The CyberVato Performance Instrument was designed as a visual backdrop, but it also included small animated vignettes that gave insight into the CyberVato character and, additionally, contained animations that Cybervato and the audience could interact with on stage.

My performance instrument designs are meant to be flexible, giving the artist the freedom to make every performance unique. One of the big advantages of computers over traditional video is that it is not linear, so the performer isn't "driven" by the video. "Go Zapata, Go" is designed with this in mind. I created this piece along with ZapNet, a collective of students at the University of Texas. In this performance instrument, there is a library of animations that contain information about the Zapatistas and focus particularly on their goals and their relationship to the Internet. The graphics are used to augment and give emotional impact to what the performer is saying. But the performer is free to use the visuals in whatever way feels most appropriate.

Rachel Rosenthal, the grand dame of Los Angeles performance art, had a pet rat for many years. Using a personal computer, we will virtually resurrect her rat, and she (or someone in her studio) will interact on stage with the virtual rat.

Working as a computer artist in collaborations for the last 20 years, I have sometimes been the most technical and at other times the least technical collaborator. Each collaboration is unique. The most important qualities that I have found for an effective collaboration are: having a shared vision, feeling comfortable to voice your opinion, patience, and the ability to really listen.

The world of performance art is more experimental and therefore more open to using personal computers. The stages are generally smaller or less defined. Whereas in a large traditional theater setting the lack of resolution and speed of a personal computer might prove inadequate, in performance art the personal computer may be an exciting option, not only in the generation of visuals, but also for its interactive possibilities.

