

Frequently Asked Questions about Cyberthon and Melbourne's 90s Rave Scene

- What was Cyberthon?** Cyberthon was a series of energetic, marathon-style live television broadcasts and events originating from Melbourne, Australia, between 1991 and 1995. Conceived by Adem Jaffers (aka Tekno Mandala) and his collaborators, Cyberthon captured the experimental and collaborative spirit of Melbourne's burgeoning rave and techno scene of the 1990s. It involved live performances by DJs, bands, and VJs, incorporating cutting-edge (for the time) digital and analogue technologies for visual and audio remixing and transmission. Cyberthon aimed to document and transmit the unique "zeitgeist" of this underground culture, often operating outside traditional broadcast norms.
- How did Cyberthon get started?** The genesis of Cyberthon can be traced back to a combination of factors. Firstly, informal gatherings at a St Kilda share-house in the late 1980s, hosted by Jeff Jaffers and Ollie Olsen, fostered discussions around emerging technologies and electronic music. Secondly, an invitation to Adem Jaffers to create a new station ID for RMITV led to a request for a short video package about Melbourne's cyber and techno subcultures, which became the doco "Cyberdelia" Directed by Steve Spangaro. A technical issue during the broadcast of "Cyberdelia" serendipitously led to a live remix and extension of the program, which in turn inspired the idea for a longer, live "marathon" of similar content, thus giving birth to the first Cyberthon event.
- What was the relationship between Cyberthon and Melbourne's 90s rave scene?** Cyberthon was deeply embedded within and reflective of Melbourne's 90s rave scene. The rave scene itself emerged as a reaction against the commercialization and exclusivity of earlier club culture, offering an inclusive, DIY platform for creativity and dancing in unconventional spaces like abandoned warehouses. Cyberthon mirrored this ethos by broadcasting live from both television studios and warehouse locations, featuring many artists and DJs who were central to the rave scene. It provided a unique outlet to showcase the music, visuals, and collaborative energy of the rave culture to a wider audience, effectively "soft-hijacking" public television to transmit this underground phenomenon.
- What role did technology play in Cyberthon?** Technology was fundamental to Cyberthon's creation and aesthetic. Artists utilized a diverse range of high and low-tech tools, including Amiga computers with software like Deluxe Paint and Imagine 3D for real-time animation, studio vision mixers and cameras, turntables, audio cassette players, and later, early online platforms. Experimentation with these technologies allowed for freeform and uncensored creation, pushing boundaries in digital art, video mixing, and even early forms of interactive and streamed events. The embrace of technology reflected the "Tekno-Cyber" spirit of the time and enabled the unique collaborative and remix-oriented nature of the broadcasts.
- How did Cyberthon embrace collaboration and remix culture?** Collaboration was a core principle of Cyberthon, attracting a wide array of artists from different disciplines who were keen to experiment and push their creative boundaries together. Moving image content, music, and other artworks were not only created but also actively re-used, remixed, and mashed up live during the broadcasts. This ethos extended to the repurposing of existing media, often without regard for copyright, reflecting a "pirate TV"

mentality. The live nature of the events fostered improvisation and spontaneous collaboration, making each Cyberthon a unique and unscripted experience.

- **How did Cyberthon engage with a wider audience beyond traditional TV broadcasts?** Cyberthon was pioneering in its adoption of online platforms to reach audiences beyond Melbourne. Notably, "Cyberthon IV: EPIC Omnicast" in 1994 was an interactive, live-streamed event that utilized technologies like Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), Mbone, and CU-SeeMe to bring in participants and viewers globally. Cyberthon artists were also early adopters of using webpages to promote their events internationally, demonstrating a forward-thinking approach to media distribution and audience engagement that went beyond the limitations of terrestrial television.
- **What is the legacy of Cyberthon and why is it being preserved by ACMI?** Cyberthon is significant as a unique historical record of Melbourne's vibrant 90s rave scene and the experimental media practices of the time. It captured a fleeting cultural moment characterized by technological innovation, artistic collaboration, and a DIY spirit. Many of the original recordings and related materials have not been seen for decades. Adem Jaffers collaborated with ACMI to preserve this archive, recognizing its importance to the collective memory of Melbourne's cultural history. ACMI's efforts ensure that future generations can access and understand this pivotal era of music, art, and technology.
- **What ultimately led to the end of Cyberthon?** While "Cyberthon V: Spectrum" evolved into an episodic series on community television, the ambitions for "Cyberthon VI: VAT," a large-scale interactive public art and technology project in collaboration with Telstra, were ultimately curtailed by external political and economic shifts. The election of a new federal government in 1996 led to the privatization of Telstra, resulting in the immediate freezing of funding for the project. This unexpected turn of events brought an end to the Cyberthon series of events and ambitious future plans, highlighting the unpredictable nature of underground cultural movements and their interaction with broader societal forces.