

The Argus

Neuroscience And The Guitar, Ropetackle Centre, Shoreham, Oct 22

3:08pm Monday 25th October 2010

By Martin Allen

Sussex University's eminent neuroscientist, Dr Anil Seth, came together with guitar virtuoso and composer Richard Durrant, animator Kate Genevieve, and projection artist Malcolm Buchanan-Dick, to give not so much a talk about the human brain, than a journey through the history of its study, and into its deepest recesses.

Following an opening sequence of beautiful animation, musical form and brainwaves evolving into abstract imagery on a huge screen, accompanied by Durrant's ethereal composition, Seth appeared behind a opaque screen, introducing us to the beginnings of his science, in 19th century Spain.

The fact that this coincided with the beginning of the great era of the Spanish guitar, set the scene for the interweaving of the parallel developments.

At one point, Seth walked around inside a giant, revolving projection of the brain, explaining the function of each part, describing its function as a "fugue", a cue for Durrant to expound upon the structure of the fugue in music, before giving an exquisite rendition of an example by Bach.

From the history of neuroscience, Seth brought us to the ever fascinating subject of consciousness, his illustrations including a strip-cartoon of a cat sleeping, before waking briefly, and then curling up again, with the caption – "Consciousness is the annoying bit between naps!"

Most graphic of his explanations of the extraordinary workings of the brain, and differences in development and capability, was the film of Durrant being wired up in the laboratory, 180 electrodes covering his head like an eccentric Ascot hat, revealing even when he was listening to music his brain was making his fingers sub-consciously play.

Part of Ropetackle's The Art of Life Science series, Neuroscience And The Guitar brilliantly illustrated how art and science are so closely allied - indeed, in this instance, an inseparable part of culture and achievement.

* The last in The Art Of Life Science series, Who's Looking At Your Medical Records, is at the Ropetackle Centre on Oct 27.

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