

Artist to take his audience to new depths

By KELLY BURKE

Perhaps it was a memorable scene in the 1954 film version of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* which first set the French composer Michel Redolfi on his quest for Utopia.

Certainly, he says, the scene in which James Mason (as the evil Captain Nemo) gives an exquisite rendition on his organ of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* on board the futuristic submarine *Nautilus* remains clearly etched in his mind.

In Sydney to create what has to be the most unusual event in the 1997 Sydney Festival, Redolfi was making himself busy at North Sydney Olympic Pool yesterday, installing and finetuning an extensive range of futuristic-looking gadgets in preparation for the opening tonight of his underwater soundscape *Virtual Lagoon*.

The temperature in the pool has been raised to a comfortable 28 degrees for the production, which can only be experienced by audience members donning swimsuits, goggles and snorkels, and then diving in.

"People are going to experience something they have never heard before," he promised. "The body becomes like a tuning fork, the sounds vibrating through the bones."

Redolfi's computer-generated music will be emitted from 16 giant resin pebbles designed by the French sculptor Lyonel Kouro. Installed on the floor of the pool, the pebbles conceal a series of optical sensors, underwater lights and speakers, which react to the audience's presence by emitting sounds of varying frequencies.

Redolfi says the music continues to grow and reproduce — just like coral.

Musical purists may dismiss his soundscapes as nothing more than a gimmick.

To this Redolfi replies: "Once you experience it you cannot think of it as such. You will listen to the sound and realise how pure it is — it is like having built-in earphones. There is no peripheral sound, not even a cough."

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Performer Michel Redolfi and some of his clam-like "speaker/sensors".