

ART NEWS



MUSICAL SCORE for "Patterns of Energy"

NEW MUSIC FORUM OF HOUSTON:
A CONCERT at DIVERSE WORKS, Aug. 26
 by Jane Ludlam

The New Music Forum of Houston held one of its first "house concerts" at Diverse Works Sunday, presenting a terrific, wide-ranging show of some of the city's most innovative performance artists/musicians. Frankly, I expected the music to be so personal as to be inaccessible and boring. Out from Michael Galbreth's amplified cricket sounds to Glenn Carmen's virtuoso performance on metal detectors, the concert proved to be tremendously entertaining as well as esthetically adventurous. The brand new MMF is doing something very right, and Diverse Works is providing a venue for music that the usual, commercial rooms would probably find too chancey.

Though Galbreth's live crickets proved uncooperative, barely making a sound, his performance of "Patterns of Energy" fortunately included taped cricket noises. The sounds of Michael playing computer, crickets, water dripping, voices and digital delay enhanced a cricket video with computer-grid overlays. Though this piece may have been a little too long or too repetitive for live performance, it would be great as ambient music, reminiscent of Brian Eno's "Music for Airports."

"Machine Language Speakeasy" incorporated disturbing sounds and imagery to question where the human body and language end and technology begins. Galbreth and Brenda Davidson, holding radios wired to little round speakers in their mouths, looked like machine people. Voices repeated the words on the video screen, "Tomorrow and tomorrow," or "sound and fury." Art Heisenberg and Hank Jensen played little mixers. The result of this ensemble effort was a reflection of the jumbled state of our current perception of technology.

In the comical yet disturbing "Us 'R Toys (Sing Along)," the ensemble had a fifth member: a stuffed, tuxedoed doll. All the players wore brightly-colored mosquito masks and bore arrows through their heads. The four humans played talking dolls, a Smurf, an executive teddy bear, a Garfield the cat and a plastic baby. As the performers pulled the toys' rings, the dolls provided the lyrics ("I love you," "You're a born leader," "There's nothing you can do," "You're a winner," "Never trust a man who's smiling") to a taped composition of Saturday morning cartoon soundtracks. This performance group should be commended for its wit and wisdom in illustrating the irony and tremendous impact of the messages of commercialism.

Remember this name: Robert Pearson. I was shocked by his virtuosity. I realize that I am at great risk of sounding overly effusive, but Pearson's incredible talent would be difficult to exaggerate. Pearson's performance of his composition for electronic piano was

unutterably moving, ranging from forceful, rolling, organic swells to delicate, microscopic melodies. His are the kind of tunes you think you hear from another room when its quiet and you've been up too long.

It's apparent how Pearson achieves this mastery, expressing such great and wide-ranging emotions with a mere electronic piano: he concentrates like mad. Eyes squinched, face contorted, he pulls feelings out of the instrument with more passion than many people expend in life. When he was done, it was written all over his face that he had to make the switch from the intensity of interior life to the relative mundaneness of the exterior world. This musician has the technical and expressive abilities to take him a long way.

Though Pearson's was a tough act to follow, Glenn Carmen's performance on amplified metal detectors [of all things] held the audience rapt. The key to this performance was the music inherent in things we take for granted. It's called "reflected metal music," and it's done by suspending swinging metal objects over a couple of metal detectors and manipulating the amp. The music ranged from the throbbing melodies of a swarm of mosquitoes to tunes of impending doom.

The last performer was "abstract vocalist" Dean Satchery, banging drumsticks on the mike stand and singing nonsense syllables. It sounded like a transmission from another world. The message included things like, "vernish never" and "matyerna," and Satchery's tone seemed to be, "I'm telling you this because you're too dumb to know it otherwise, not that I really care about you." Performed with almost manic fervor, it was a funny, intriguing way to wind up the concert.

Nobody did anything conventional at the New Music Forum of Houston's first concert at Diverse Works. The performers showed that you can make music well with everything from insects to toys, and entertain while you're at it. If you're hungry for something besides guitars and "Oh, baby's," MMF will have two more concerts at Diverse Works this fall.



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