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Welcome to the double issue of Performance Magazine. The next issue will be back down to the normal price of £1.50 and will appear at the beginning of March 1985. It will be a theme issue, called *LEARNING TO FLY*, and will concentrate on artists who have trained in unusual skills to carry out their work. Deadlines beginning February 1986.
Happy New Year.

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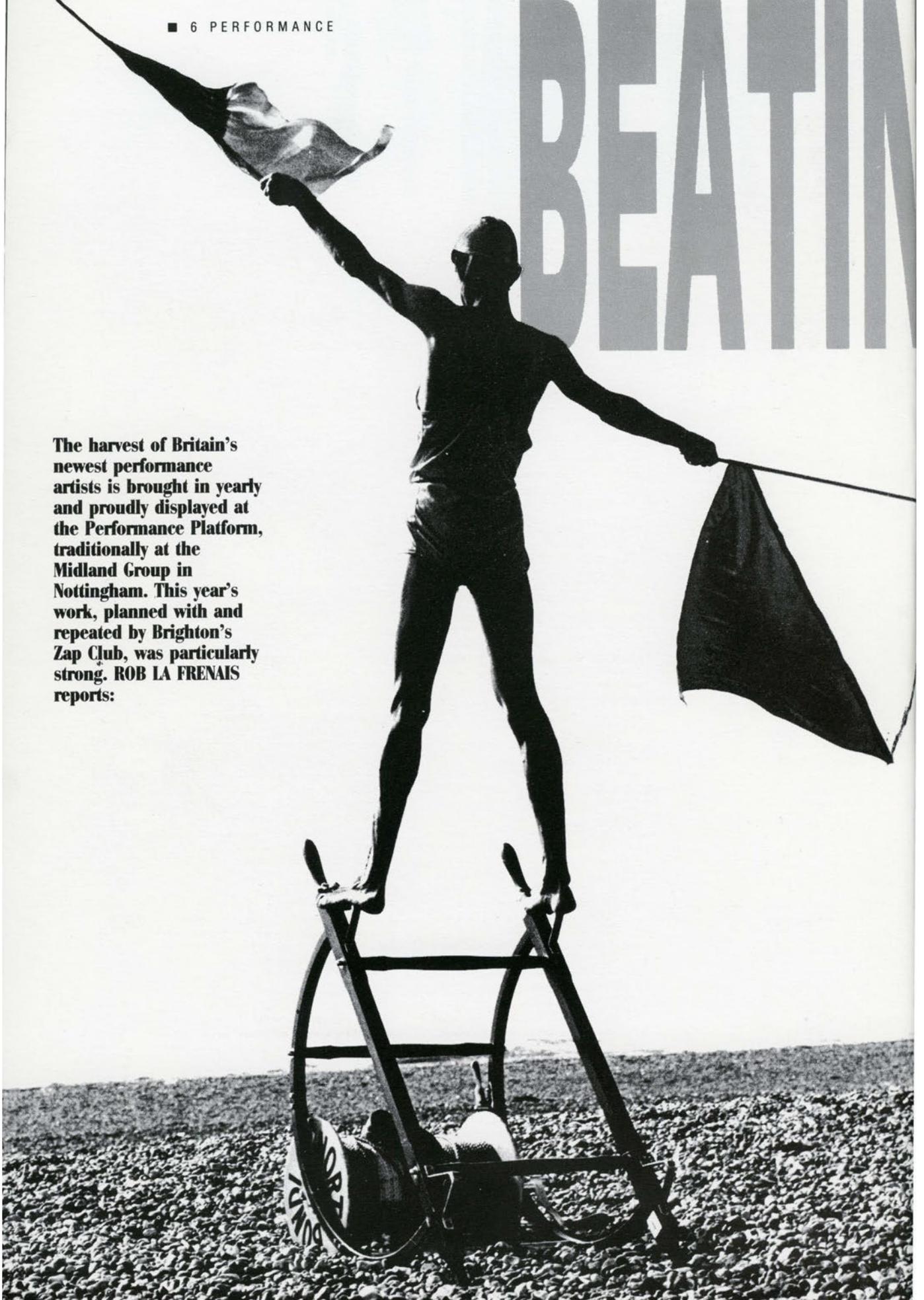
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Arts Council Funded

BEATING

The harvest of Britain's newest performance artists is brought in yearly and proudly displayed at the Performance Platform, traditionally at the Midland Group in Nottingham. This year's work, planned with and repeated by Brighton's Zap Club, was particularly strong. ROB LA FRENAIS reports:



THE LIVE ART TRAIL

PERFORMANCE 7 ■

The frontiers are open. The long march is on. People working in experimental areas in all fields are moving together. The funding agencies are beginning to cotton on. Theatre companies are making performance art, and they are admitting it. Performance artists are tightening up, 'presenting' themselves. Institutions that would never dream of programming live art are now doing it. The ones that have been are wielding greater power and influence. The Bow Gamelan Ensemble are on at The Place, hitherto a dance purists sanctuary. The Belgian live art supergroup Jan Fabre plan to fill the Albert Hall. Regional Arts Associations are remembering they have a performance art budget.

The ideal spot to note the core of all this renewed activity is the Midland Group, Nottingham, who have been putting on their Performance Art Platform without fail throughout the lean years when they all laughed at performance art and went on selling their paintings. I say, ideal, not because it is necessarily the *best* in the country, though most certainly a contender, but because it provided within a tight three day schedule a microcosm of new activity, to be tackled on the run at a breathless pace, until life outside that building seemed more objectified as art than in.

It's now four days long, and the whole circus, once over, was this year whisked down to start all over again at Brighton's Zap Club. A traditionalist, I rode on the conveyor belt the whole way at Nottingham, picking up selected events at Brighton.

This year, the selectors (Nikki Millican, Midland Group, Neil Butler, Zap) had set up a shell-like structure, with special commissioned pieces from more experienced groups and artists surrounding the main core, bubbling under with new, unpredictable material. It's of course the new stuff one goes to see, because if they're serious about what they're doing, then live art has a future in this country. The binding, if you like, was provided by ABDC Workshop, Anne Bean, Holly

Warburton and the theatre group, Hidden Grin. The first three are well situated in (what used to be) the fine art camp. Hidden Grin were not, and it is them I was particularly interested in following, to observe their trek down the live art trail. They were to meet a number of the platform performers coming back in the other direction . . .

Hidden Grin have an interesting genealogy. They are a splinter of the group known as Rational Theatre, now operating as R.T. Production. This group was founded by Peter Godfrey, and was itself a split-off from a company now shrouded in the mists of legend, the Phantom Captain. This was founded by Neil Hornick and Joel Cutrara, who are now in their late forties and in semi-retirement (though recently I hear they did a completely unannounced and unpublicised performance in the window of a travel agents in London's glitzy Trocadero), and was cut by the Arts Council in 1981. This group was subversive in every possible way, and its best performances were held in the form of a religious service (The First Church of the Phantom Captain) but their subversion was not one of performance art. They were instead philosophers who used highly trained actors to perpetrate their zen parodies, their hyper-realistic practical jokes. Though pitched towards chaos, their performers were highly disciplined tools. In Rational Theatre, formed shortly after the cut, Peter Gofrey enlisted the skills of fine arts to pull off their most acclaimed works (*Orders of Obedience and Roccoco*), but ultimately, his work was at most highly decorative spectacle, albeit with stimulating overkill of sensory information. Then Rational performed *The Hidden Grin*, which was to become the company's name — a more co-operative effort — and become a minor cult sensation in the smaller spaces it was performed in. Now Hidden Grin, a company in its own right, were to be found here, in the Midland Group, constructing an installation-based event, just starting as I arrived for the start of the 1985 platform. ▶

Brighton beach becomes Bondi Beach, courtesy of Peter McRae

Photo: Tamzin Griffin



Exit Ken Turner (ADBC) pursued by audience.

Photo: Paul Burwell

Overseen. Overheard, Overlooked was first and foremost a pile of equipment. In other works, it was a technical environment of video screens, microphones, sound and lights that delineated its own atmosphere. I last recall seeing something like it at the Video Show at the Serpentine Gallery in 1975. It has to be said that the video content itself, by Steve Littman, was brilliant. All possibilities of information retrieval of an individual personality from driving licences to astrological profiles were flashed across the screen. In the middle of a studio-cum boxing ring was placed a white and black dressed subject of a sensory deprivation experiment and bombarded, EST like, with a volley of personality-test question. Sexual, social and philosophical. It was like Anna Raeburn meets *The Prisoner*. I am a name not a number. Highly effective. Cold and above all performed. I mean *acted*. I left thinking that they were playing games. Cashing in. Jumping on the bandwagon. I had seen it all before. Theatre getting in on a phoney live art ticket. But let's see how they stay the course.

Michael Milward's *Notes From the Burning Bush*, the first in the platform. Claimed to be 'a live investigation of belief systems via the socialising effect of faith, rituals and dogmas'. It wasn't. He made a number of 'actions', buttering a lingam, a bit of ritual bondage and flagellation, some Kung Fu, and assemblages of a gun blindfold. It came out all to clever-clever and I didn't believe a bit of it. Sorry.

Dogs in Honey, done up with porridge-made-up faces looked more promising. They started out in a futurist-fashion-show image, wrapped in decadent netting with glittery bits on it, reading poems. Despite a rather disgruntled feeling about their over-reached name-dammit I wanted to *see* actual *dogs* in actual *honey*, I became steadily intrigued by their performance. As they moved forwards, maniacally scratching themselves all over, they seemed to veer in to a situation of real risk. 'Why don't you fuck off' whispered one to another, and repeated it, almost inaudibly. To my frustration, they then became almost mannered, in a drum-machine sort of way. As they ended up wrapping a pint of beer in cling-film, after a volley of uncertain images, I felt they were on to something, but were trying too hard — too much — too soon. But a real sense of potential.

Dave Micheson started up with his face in a bowl of custard. Turning on to his ghastly dripping visage a handy angelpoise he started off on an autobiographic whinge. 'Lies, all lies!' — a recording of his mother coming out with all those nasty reminiscences about his childhood that every grown person dreads his/her 'loving' relative churning out. A lot of people thought this was naff. He caught my interest and

sympathy.

Marie Michael was the first genuine audience-threatening piece and she wasn't even in it. The audience were placed claustrophobically close to a sheet of PVC. Behind it were further sheets. Slowly, the sheets were cut away with razor blades. We could hear it, but not see it, except on a very indistinct video screen. The razor came close. A slide projection illuminated the slashes. The web of cuts became more complex and powerful as the performer approached the front of the audience. A simple idea, carried out with cool effectiveness.

Sarah Jane Edge was the 'best of '84' and in *The Essential Woman* deals with images of violence dealt out to women. Particularly in relation to the treatment of suffragettes and its parallels to N. Ireland. Edge daubs slogans around slide images, and while the performance is in a simplistic, didactic form, does not fail in impact. Forced feeding, forced confession, forced entry . . . forces of democracy. Political and effective as art.

P. Maticos and R. B. Thompson in *Music as a Foreign language* was amusing, anarchistic mucking around. Tying ribbons to various parts of their bodies and extending them out to members of the audience, they then could be pulled and the instruments they held 'played'. Afterwards they held an auction of some art objects. Very clever-very stupid. And that was the end of the first day of platform performances.

The second day of the platform opened promising with Peter McRae showing the most extraordinary films of Australian life-guard processions. Wildly androgynous in swimming-hats and one-piece bathing tunics, the beach boys, old and young, marked up and down with 'surf reels' — large wooden pulley cylinder trucks — one of which McRae happened to have handy there and then in the Midland Group. While he struck up various life-guard postures, most unusual events started to happen on the screen. McRae himself appeared in this macho surf setting wearing a red dress with two semaphore flags and began a whirling dervish dance around Bondi Beach. Soon, calmly recorded by the cameraperson, who seemed not to take steps to intervene, he was set upon by a group of young bloods, who proceeded to chase him then throw him in the sea. Unfortunately the effect was somewhat lost by the proximity of all the equipment in the room, making the performance somewhat cluttered. When he repeated it at Brighton, on advice from others, he conducted it at a distance and it worked far better. Overall, we seem to have got beyond the ideal home-demonstration stand style of careful performance these days and its return should be discouraged.

Next were a group of young artists who seemed to be going in the direction

of visual theatre. Indeed, they list Impact as one of their influences. forced Entertainment Theatre Co-operative's *The Set Up* was one of the most disciplined pieces of work that weekend. Immaculately timed, worked upon, comic, literary, tense, yet coming out if a visual tradition. Only when they left the wonderfully sharp torture pastiche sequence to indulge in some sub-Impact manic guilt undress-dressing, did I stop thinking of them as one of the brighter hopes for the next few years. Forget the *hommage*. Forget all you know about visual theatre in the early '80s. Concentrate on your own performance spirit.

Fabricata Illuminata! What felt like at least fifty skinhead lemming technicians running round a space, stoking the fires, pushing the sound and light levels up, blasting the audience with heat, real red hot coiled bars of heat, stinging eucalyptus smoke. More heat boys more heat! Still not quite enough for me, but the only one of its genre in this years platform. I give them A plus for trying.

Tamzin Griffin — A new Charlotte Moorman? Jenny Wimborne — passion and toasted sandwiches. Incomplete technical problems. More to be developed. That's it for this years intake. Well selected and highly motivated — there's hope for performance yet.

Ken Turner will not thank me for mentioning that he is now the oldest actively working British performance ►

'I am a name not a number' Hidden Grin line up for interrogation.

Photo: Paul Wornell



BEATING THE LIVE ART TRAIL

artist. His ADBC workshop, with Yolanda Snaith, Helen Powell and others, was another of the commissioned pieces for Eight Days. Turner himself came late into the area, having worked previously in the sixties and seventies as an environmental artist and sculpture. He co-founded the group Action Space, which exists to this day, and which was at the spearhead of the integration of fine art ideas into the community, site-specific, situations. This became a large group which eventually split into several wings and Turner became more involved with the fusion between Architecture, hermeneutic philosophy, and performance.

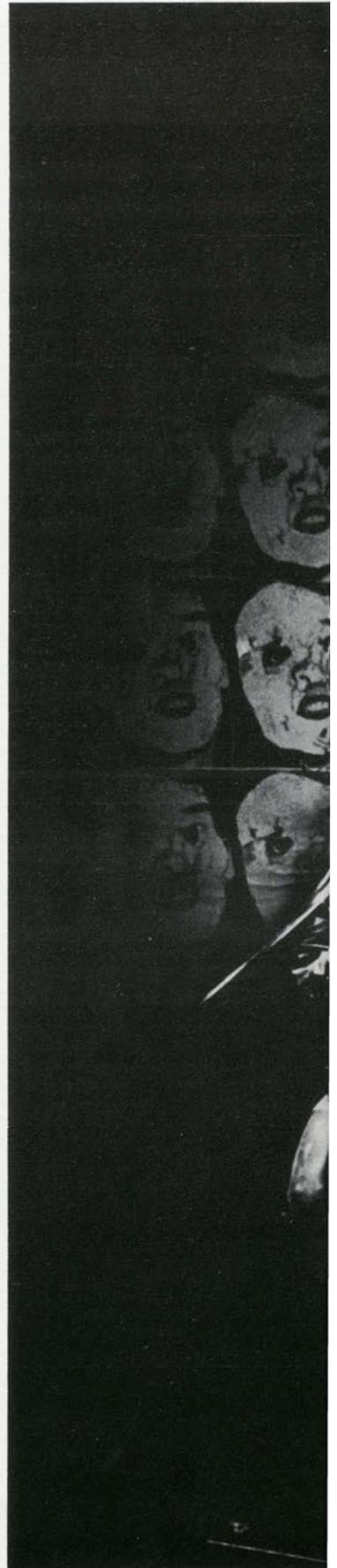
The work of ADBC reflects this, though some of the almost baroque images he produces defy definition within any context. His personal performance involves a great deal of risk and spontaneity, within a tight thematic structure. His is also a natural comic figure, and the dynamic of an ADBC performance is reliant on the power of his initial 'appearance' whether it is behind a wall or out of a trapdoor. At Nottingham he employed the use of two figures 'A' Runner in the Shadows' a post-apocalyptic jogger in rags, and a Roller of Horizons, to lead the audience into various spaces, one in which a film based on a supernatural double exposure which took place at York Cathedral just before it was struck by lightning, the other, a cunningly decorated performance space which used a startling trompe d'oeil mirror effect, within which Turner became a kind of Dadaist Master of Ceremonies. The impression of the whole thing was a kind of Futurism-meets - Festival-of-Britain-style epic. The piece was the hardest-worked of the whole festival, and was bursting with ideas. It also translated naturally to the sea-front at Brighton.

My only criticism of Turner, is that he used his performing collaborators as cyphers, as decorative additions to his own main theme. I'm sure they wouldn't see themselves as that, and perhaps it is necessary for some kind of subordination to the whole, but I'm sometime slightly uneasy about it, particularly in his use of dancers. However, his work remains my personal best of the weekend.

Anne Bean was as always highly ambitious in her work, and it was unfortunate that the technical difficulty of her piece prevented it in her eyes at least — from containing the necessary

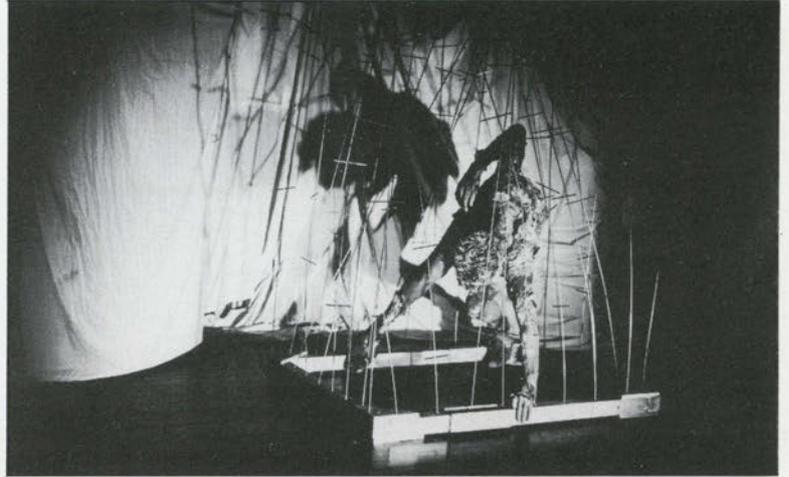
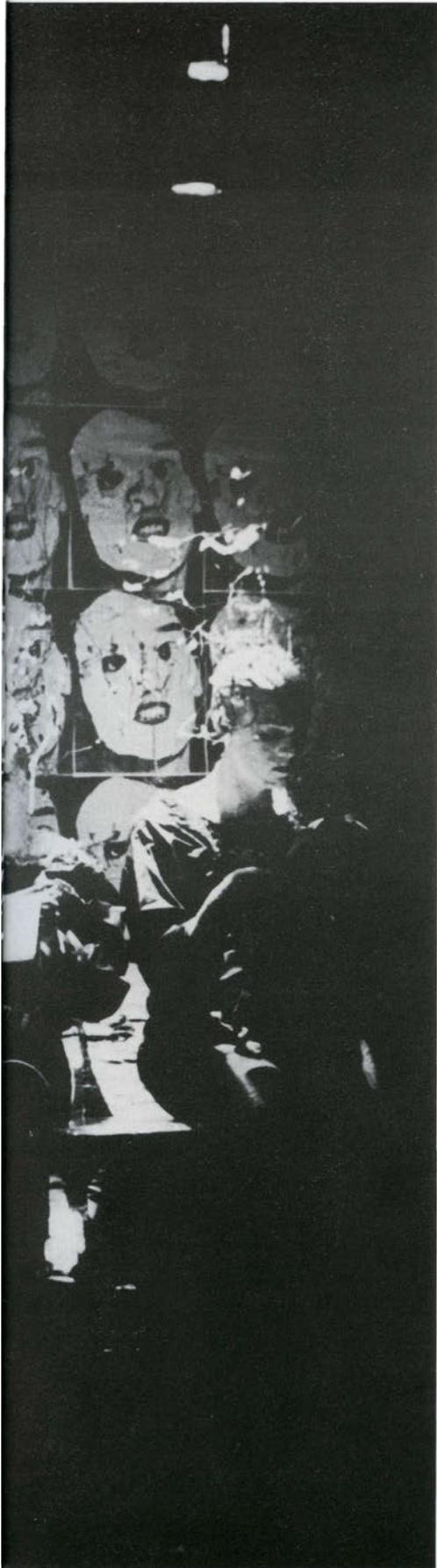
feeling, or spirit, that she clearly relies on for a successful performance. Her collaborators for the evening slowly constructed a wooden pyramid painstakingly, with saws and woodworking materials, while Bean herself sat calmly in the audience drinking a beer. Once completed, she entered the space and was sealed into the pyramid, with a black and decker drill and an electric light on a loose lead. Silence, then a slow, muffled buzz, as she started drilling holes from inside, then gaining momentum, began to tear her way out with it, till all one saw was a snarling mass of flailing hair, drill, lightbulb and splinters. Impressive, dangerous, but in a laboratory sort of sense with the audience sitting to one side as dulled, objective viewers. She was not happy with the piece, and, I believe, repeated it with considerable success at the Zap Club the following weekend. But I was at the stage when I was as happy to see a theoretically good piece as the real thing. Certainly, some of the platform performers could well have taken some lessons from her on the essential nature of risk.

All the time, passing through from performance to performance, had been Hidden Grin and their installation. Each of the four members had been blindfolded, each experimented upon, bathed in the glow of the monitors. They were beginning to stop 'performing'. Yet, there was still a kind of hidden, unspoken barrier around them and their area. It is only when they got to Brighton that things seriously started to change for them. In the polytechnic gallery, where I visited, right at the end of the whole eight days, they had transformed their space into a working environment. Newspaper headlines on the wall, items from their lives in glass cages. 'Confessions' spewing out of a computer terminal. That days copy of the *Sun* had just been pasted up on the wall: 'Budgie Roasted Alive in Microwave'. Its pertinence to the piece was almost uncanny. The 'technicians' now acknowledged the presence of the public when they walked in. They were moving around the space in 'real time' not acted time. When something was about to happen they said so. They had made the trip, from eight days previous in Nottingham to Brighton, along the trail from mannerism to . . . what? Whatever it was they were *there*, not in some method actor's imaginary space. Welcome to performance art, Hidden Grin. ●



Dogs in Honey (left), ADBC Workshop, Sarah Jane Edge (Top, middle and bottom)

Photo: Paul Wombell





HONEY SALVADORI on this year's New Dancers in Dance Umbrella:

Anne Seagrave says no thank you

Every year the Dance Umbrella throws together a motley collection of soloists and groups whose only common denominator is that they perform on the same tour circuit. They all get labelled as postmodernists but that's a much abused term. Postmodernism is, in essence, a subversion and very few of what I prefer to call the New Dancers subvert anything.

What they do is rebel, which isn't quite the same thing, and it's a rebellion that has lasted 20 years so it's getting a little tired. Natural movement-based choreography and contact improvisation have become merely another style. So the best current work is concerned with getting out of the ghetto.

In the late-night series at the Place, one of the New Dancer slots, Katie Duck and Group O set about doing that by utilising the dancers' imaginations as well as their physical dexterity. Taking a strong image as starting point — their new show *The Orange Man* was taken from Gunther Grass' *The Tin Drum* — Duck uses the rehearsal period to coax images and memories from her performers then she juxtaposes them subjectively.

The Orange Man opens onto a space cut in half by a curtain. On one side is a room set. Paper fish hang from above. A woman dressed in a business suit sits with a newspaper. A man, similarly dressed, runs across the stage with a feather head-dress and bow and arrow. Enter an other

the company she can't really avoid it). The mish-mash of influences work in the first half because the piece has a fixed visual reference, ie a set. Duck's message seems to be that this is 'Theatre' and she is tampering with it, or subverting it.

But in the second half the curtain comes across and the set is lost. There are fewer images and they have less apparent meaning. The movement is more complex but also more predictable. It's almost as if there weren't enough ideas to sustain an hour of performance. Although there is a certain pleasure in watching five energetic and individualistic dancers, personal charisma wasn't quite enough to sustain my interest.

The cult of personality is particularly evident in the work of ex-students of Dartington College. The 'me' mediating between dance and audience seems to have been taught as a method of pepping up the content. Danielle Hogan, a recent graduate of the college, uses the method in *The People Noise*. She introduced and intercut her dance, to a tape of street sounds, with talk of her view of the city.

'In the city the birds sing at night ... it's only at night that they can hear each other's news over the people noise' she tells us in a flat and unemotional voice with a quizzical look on her face. The same nervous expression accompanies her dance, as if she's deep in thought.

Later on the sound switches to a

REBELLS SUBVEI

raincoated woman who lights the candles on a birthday cake. Hymns are heard off stage. The atmosphere is confined and gloomy, the paintings of George Grosz come to mind.

But at various points so does the work of Magritte, de Chirico, La Gaia Scienza, Pina Bausch and Jacques Tati. Although Duck's methods partake of the individual's imagination the result seems derivative of a number of people's work.

Which is not to its detriment. Since diversity is one of her watchwords (and with at least 3 nationalities in

tape of — apparently — African women's voices. 'Women victims are invisible' she says. Is she drawing a parallel between wild life and women's lives? If so, it serves as an admirable account of the reasons why she wanted to create the piece. But it's a little flawed. I find it hard to accept that women are as ineffectual as birds, and the inclusion of the African tape is worrying. Using non-Western culture in Western work is a tricky area and one that needs a lot of thought if it's not to appear patronising. Still, Hogan is obviously a hopeless romantic.

Catherine Jefferson, another ex-

LIVE ART NOW

Dartington student, has a little more sass and suss. In *Illbeing* her background is a distorted and echoed voice. She is dressed in outsize shirt and boots. She plays with foods backchats the audience and courts violence with an impious glint in her eyes. *Illbeing* was short but left the impression of an infectiously charming performer with an ear and eye for the posturising of mis-spent youth, but it wasn't without a serious undercurrent. I look forward to her future work.

Anne Seagrave also wears bright eyes and a mischeivous grin on stage. She's irreverent about dance and delights in debunking Theatre, though neither are the point of the show.

No Thankyou She Says began by her pacing the stage, giving an account of what she would be doing, and ended with her telling the trials and tribs of dealing with the funding agencies. In between it was a tightly structured piece, switching from voice to dance at regular intervals but tied by both disciplines having a recurring phrase.

In her spoken sections she says no thank you to much of what mainstream life has to offer — a (lousy) minimum wage, bad landlords and pre-judged bursaries. In her dance she is frenetic and idiosyncratic, yanking herself round the space with her plait or pushing from behind.

It adds up to a sharp comment about the pitfalls of a life spent



Photo: Susan Lamb

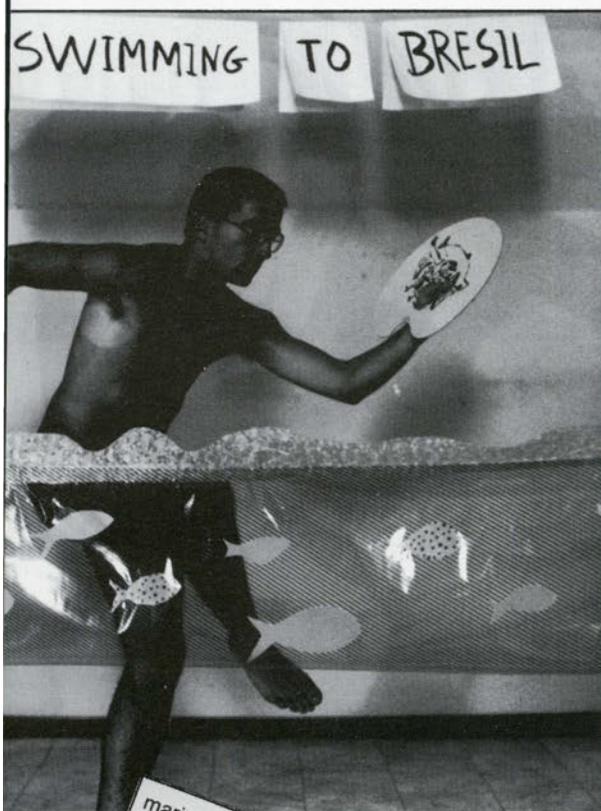
S ANNE RSIVES

avoiding personal and artistic categorisation. It's also very funny, although the scant Dance Umbrella audience didn't seem to know whether they could laugh out loud and Seagrave had to work hard to sustain the sense of complicity with her spectators that is the basis of her work.

Although one of her feet is placed firmly in the New Dance camp she has taken a giant step out of their ghetto. Seagrave, and others like her, don't belong to any one style. They're diverse and subversive. Perhaps they're post-modern? ●



TARA BABEL on a unique performance festival in Portugal:



About twenty miles from Lisbon on the 'Sun Coast', lies Cascais, an attractive tourist resort and fishing village and it is this unlikely setting that plays host to ALTERNATIVA 4. The catalyst and patron of this unconventional event is Egidio Alvaro, a Portuguese art critic who lives in Paris. He has previously been responsible for organising a festival of Portuguese performance art in the Pompidou Centre, has put performance events on, regularly, in his gallery in Paris and has organised the three previous ALTERNATIVA festivals at Almada, Portugal.

I arrived on the second day of the five day festival, and soon learnt from some of the other artists that the best venues for performing were the beach, the park, the harbour, or the town as the allocated gallery space housed an exhibition of paintings by French artist Luc Lerouge, also several installations of 'found' objects. Although the exhibition was varied and interesting, it did hinder and distract from performances. With no technical equipment available many artists choose the outside environment to work in. Improvisation and adaptability were the main rules of the festival and as it turned out, the natural settings enhanced and added to many performances.

I was particularly impressed by the professionalism and determination shown by the artists working outdoors. We had been given permission in the evening to use the beautiful *Park do Museu* by the local town council. Berlin based American artist, Benoit Maubrey used the Park to his advantage with his 'audio jackets', designed by himself and Hans Peter Kuhn. Each of the five jackets was worn by a volunteer who paced through the trees on different routes, each jacket concealing a tape recorder which played a variety of treated noises, jungle sounds, helicopters, laughing, voice delay and finally an audio dance floor sequence. Each recording was played slightly off time and the effect was a stunning cinqaphonic mixture of sounds echoing through the park. Later he told me he had also made an audio jacket for the Mayor of Berlin to relieve the Mayor of making speeches, and an audio hamburger that played the German National Anthem.

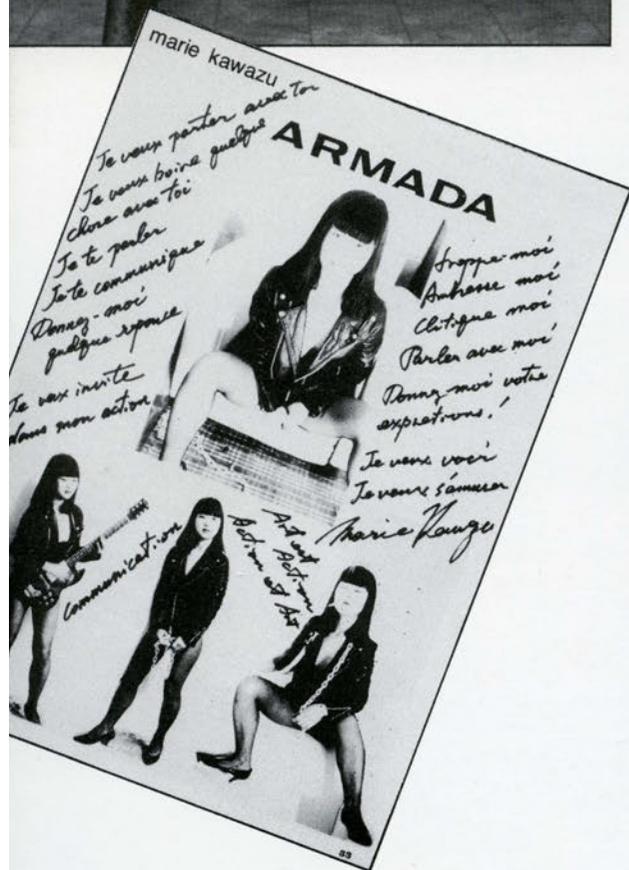
Dutch artist Marcel Van Bommel transformed the park into a magical mystery land and led the audience by little spotlights on her feet. On the path we followed we experienced rocks that moved of their own accord, burning footprints, illuminated images of reptiles and culminated at a lily pond on which Marcel floated 'night light' candles

THE PAR SUNO

on constructed lily leaves. Quiet and serene she explained about her piece, *Looking For Clues*, that 'the visible parts of art are signs of a large invisible world.'

As a direct contrast to this piece, Kees Mol was struggling with the elements of nature rather than harmonising with them. He had set up camp by the edge of an empty swimming pool amidst the darkness of the trees. A tinny transistor radio emitted from a small hut he had erected, from here he set out to battle his way through the wild foliage around the pool burdened by a rucksack full of breeze blocks and sand. His feet cut and bruised, he reached the centre of the empty pool and opening beer bottles with his bare hands read aloud his poetry while setting fire to a large bonfire to end in a blazing inferno of sticks and branches. His performance was as much a struggle against himself as with nature, and unlike many performances, was a real episode from the artist's life, not acted but pursued with aggressive determination, oblivious of any audience.

Situated just outside the town was a fairy-tale beach complete with a castle, a bridge and swirling sea. It was here French artist Catherine Meziat set her performance. She projected delicate glass transparencies of sea like creatures into a frame of gauze by means of little torches. In the breath-taking surroundings, the piece came momentarily close to bridging the gap between fantasy and reality ending with Catherine, her gauze around her like a cloak, disappearing under the bridge into the black ocean. Also working with transient images was Dutch artist Joep Neefjes, (part of the duo Droparchief), who developed his large photographic prints in a most unusual way. He used three large sand pits normally used for litter, as developing tanks, turned the process of photographic printing into a public performance and then exhibited the finished images at a gallery in



LIVE ART NOW

BEAST OF PARIS ON THE



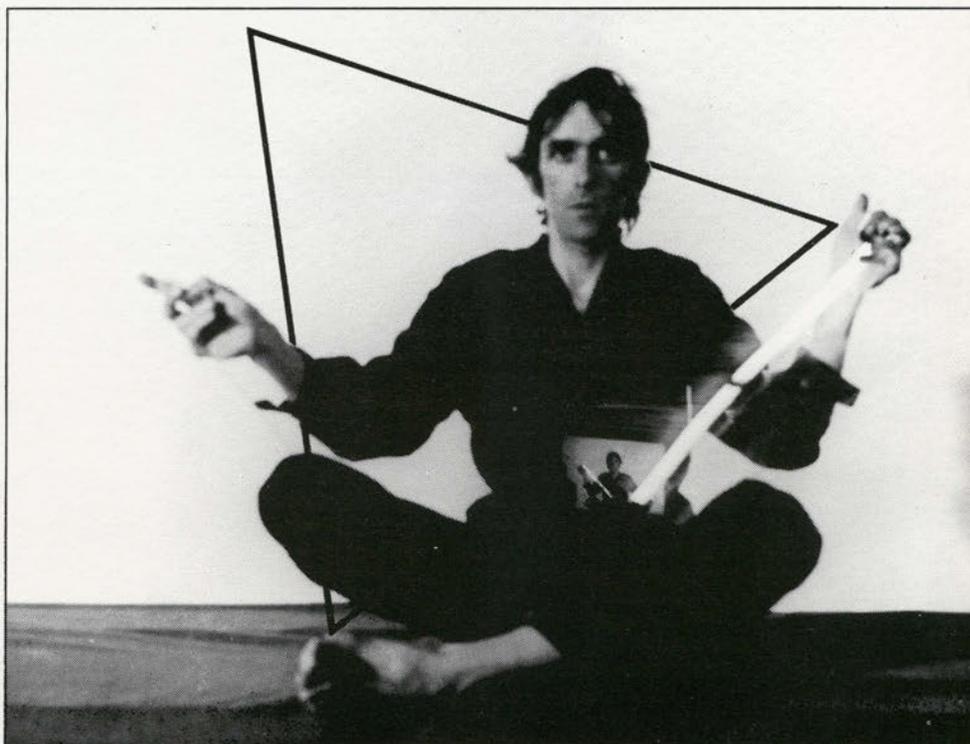
Lisbon. A good example of utilising various artistic medias with performance to create an effective result.

Of the eight Portuguese artists who took part in the festival, Antonio Olaio and Silvestre Pestana stood out for their professionalism and originality. Antonio Olaio worked just outside the Palacio Cidadela Gallery with his performance *Swimming to Brazil*. His stylised swimming motion on dry land set against the real background of the sea created a neat and witty performance. Inside the gallery Silvestre Pestana used his installation of coloured neon tubes and plastic cord as the set for his performance. He sat inside his small environment and strained against the plastic bonds enclosing him, pushing out his neon tubes until he finally sunk back into the structure as the lights went out.

Mineo Aayamagugi's somewhat predictable slow quick movements seemed monotonous compared to other events. Although well executed and visually interesting, his piece seemed long drawn out.

Berliner Suzanne Krist also chose to work inside. As a performer and painter her work is reminiscent of Austrian artists Otto Muehl and Günter Brus yet not as aggressive. By taking red paint in her mouth, beast-like she bit and kissed a naked man who lay face down on the stone floor. Accompanied by a pulsating soundtrack and a fish head tied to her hair, she evoked a mood of bizarre intensity.

On the last night of the festival we all took part in an 'Action Extravaganza' in the courtyard outside the gallery. Marie Kawazu, the 'Beast of Paris', provided her throaty vocals while French musicians Dieter Hebben and Jean Christoph Aveline supplied bass and percussion with Kees Mol and myself performing. As an experimental hotch-potch of styles it turned out to be very entertaining and drew a large crowd of locals and tourists. Altogether the festival was varied and different from any other



of its kind, with the work and organisation of Egidio Alvaro enabled a broader performance dialogue to be exchanged on a multi-cultural level bringing together talented individuals from throughout Europe to create an international festival as not yet seen in Britain. In his own words, Egidio Alvaro says of ALTERNATIVA 4:— 'It was for me an exceptional time, areas of work and involvement unique in the world, a group of artists and work of a rare quality creating performances and installations truly alternative.' ●

Top left: Antonio Olaio

Bottom left: Marie Kawazu

Top right: Suzanne Krist

Bottom right: Silvestre Pestana



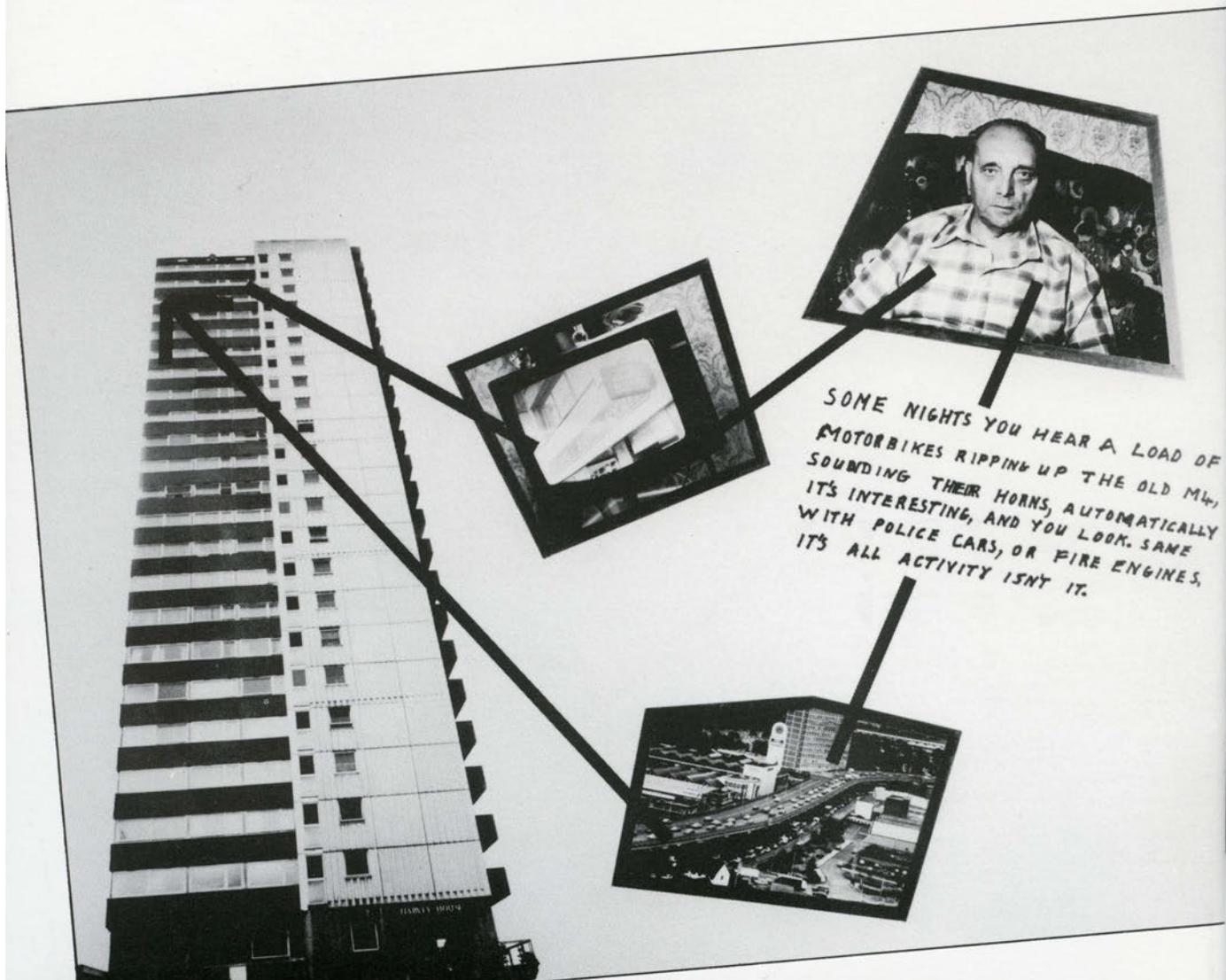
ROB LA FRENAIS visits Brentford Towers,

Steve Willats leads a highly monastic existence. He works at projects over a period of one, even several years, and when he is 'making a piece' with people, as is his mode, he is reliant on being able to work his way almost completely into their lives. Some have accused him of being a voyeur, of living off the experience of non-artists unable to control their lives, but after visiting his latest piece and site of work, *Brentford Towers*, I would strongly defend him on the grounds that he possibly gives more of himself to the work, than *anyone* else would find safe or even healthy.

Willats is a 'difficult' customer. He is highly defensive about his works, and often with good reason, because they are in a highly-tuned and volatile situations. After working with the inhabitants of one of Brentford Towers, Harvey House, making a work with nearly half the inhabitants of a 22 storey block, and, with

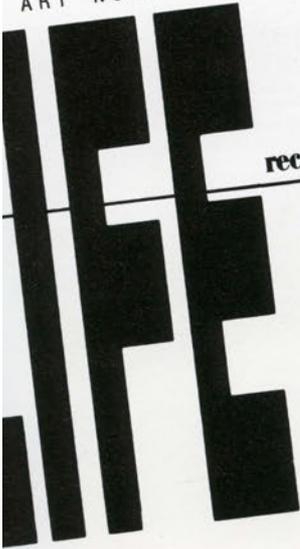
considerable and continuous discussion, consultation, and possibly some persuasion, (but that is conjunctural) reexhibiting photo-pieces highly personal to the inhabitants on the often bleak and unfriendly stairwells, there was the feeling that he really was walking on a tightrope. Indeed, he himself feels that he stretched the tolerance of the situation as far as it could possibly go, without some tensions exploding. And Harvey House in Brentford Towers is no enviable workplace. 'There's no way' says Willats 'I could possibly glamourise life here'. Sarah Kent, *Time Out* art critic said of it 'I couldn't get out of Harvey House fast enough'.

Yet Harvey House is by no means



SOME NIGHTS YOU HEAR A LOAD OF MOTORBIKES RIPPING UP THE OLD M4, SOUNDING THEIR HORNS, AUTOMATICALLY IT'S INTERESTING, AND YOU LOOK. SAME WITH POLICE CARS, OR FIRE ENGINES, IT'S ALL ACTIVITY ISNT IT.

ART NOW

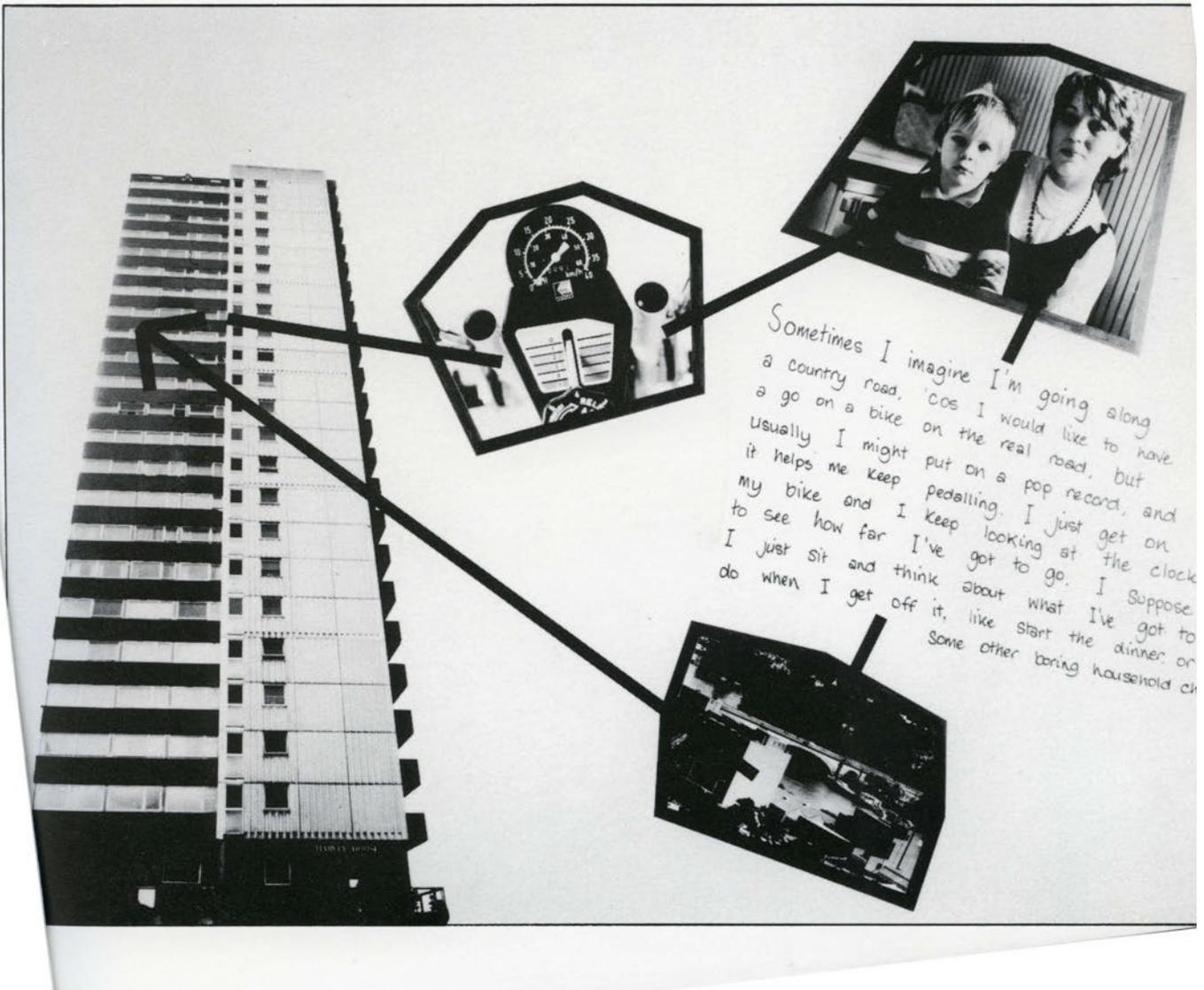


recent workplace of Steve Willats.

a 'problem estate' Willats rejected the idea of Ronan Point because there was no chance of making a work with them which was not about the highly simple reality of their wanting to get out. But Brentford Towers represents a fair crack at the concept of post-war utopian housing conditions. It is as successful as such an estate can hope to be. The fact is, all the tenants are incarcerated in their flats — the sense of community is there in name but not in spirit it is a failure in social terms.

Yet, people survive, adapt as they always have, whether it be escapism (one early middle-aged couple live on their memories of travel abroad, another young mother rides her exercise cycle and imagines herself

cycling down a country lane). On one side of the tower a man relates to the green of overlooking Kew Gardens, one on the other side notes 'a load of motorbikes ripping up the old M4.' Each has established a kind of symbiosis with what they see out of the window, and Willats has very simply captured this in the boards — the photos by him, the writing by them (though each are discussed) — in the way he has simply joined up, in four black lines linking the person, an inside view, the floor of the block, and the outside view. It is a clear raw, unadorned life statement, I for one would be scared stiff of having such a personal statement door, let alone anywhere else. Willats has carried out skillfully a highly sensitive, and demanding task, which I believe very few artists, working alone with no organisational, political or community art backup, would dare to undertake. ●





BOYD TONKIN on a refugee from alternative cabaret who's given up playing it for laughs:

PANIC AND TRAUMA W

FISH FINGERS

You may have noticed recently the buses striped with a polyglot Euro-slogan: *C'est tant mieux, vale di più*, and so on. Next time Glasgow chamber of commerce try to sell their city in Düsseldorf or Barcelona they might consider taking Oscar McLennan along. Though scarcely an advertisement for adolescence in Strathclyde, he is miles better than the circus of insipid cabaret turns that passes for 'alternative comedy' at the moment.

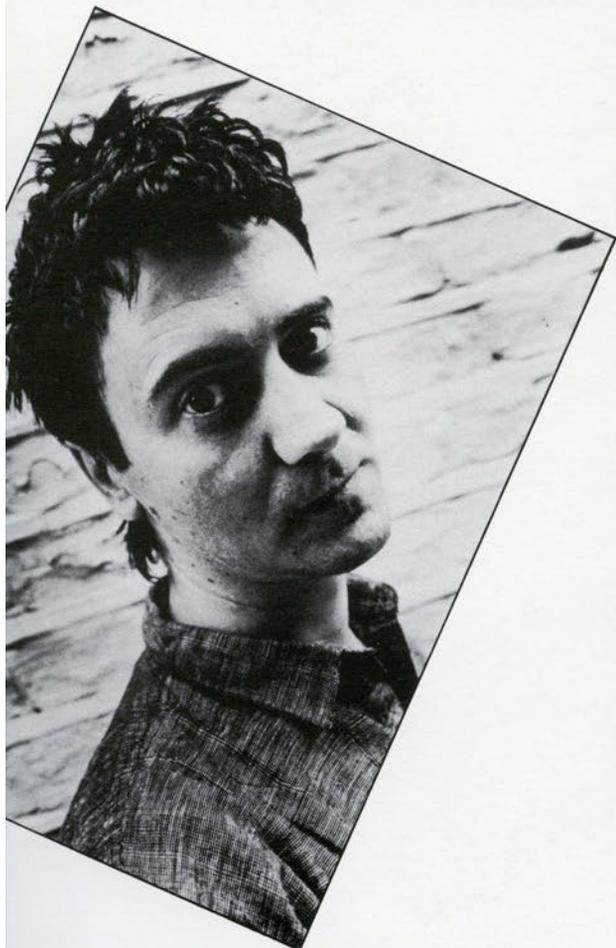
At length and with passion, McLennan tells stories of growing up guilty in households where panic and trauma come served with the fish-fingers. Playing in a much darker key, he has affinities with the other disconsolate bard of Scotch sitting-rooms, Ivor Cutler. But McLennan's trade is rougher. Unaided by much in the way of sets, jokes or sparring-partners, he enacts little histories of desolation whose craft and zest, in writing and telling, turn raw pain into a grating eloquence of word and gesture.

Not that he pretends to realism. Rather, he takes some everyday tale of domestic violence — a child abused, a wife driven spare — and finds some aptly bizarre series of images and actions able to convey a depth of terror that a more sober or discreet language might betray. Nothing would be more temptingly pompous than to compare his solo performance with some late Samuel Beckett monologue. But I was actually reminded of another culture-hero of the Sixties. Their emotions raked and scrambled by contradictory signals from parents, adults, lovers, spouses, McLennan's narrators' grotesque but quite lucid

reports on the nuclear family in shock can sound very like the self-descriptions of schizophrenic patients gathered by his fellow Glaswegian R. D. Laing. Oscar would feel at home in the tidy house of Mr and Mrs Double-Bind.

His current act *Drip Drip* mixes first- and third-person narration over its three sections. They add up to an unbroken, uncushioned hour of blight and grief. Praised at the Edinburgh Festival and the ICA, the show — directed by Sophia Caldwell — uses minimal props and lighting and targets all its energies on McLennan's voice and face: the sallow mask of a debauched altar-boy. In *Cold Turkey* Oscar suffers (I think that's the right word) his first orgasm at the hands of Uncle Bill as the prince of darkness broods over the family Christmas dinner. Elsewhere, a pet goldfish expires unforgettably — Camille with gills. In *Drip Drip* itself, a husband slowly and cumulatively torments his wife, on of his instruments an endlessly dripping tap. Yes, people do laugh: defensively or derisively, but also in recognition of these Dickensian cartoon versions of some pretty ordinary events.

In the West we now dislike and distrust anyone who offers to tell us a story, rather than put on an act or crack a joke. They may well be drunk, disturbed, or at the very least unhappy. For Walter Benjamin, writing in the Thirties, 'More and more often there is embarrassment all round when the wish to hear a story is expressed.' (*The Storyteller*) McLennan embarrasses his audience for a number of self-evident reasons: the want of a throwaway English



STEVE ROGERS on the view from the street:

WATCHERS

WATCHED

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irony; the savage and piercing delivery of a speech that can sing and scream as well as whisper; the refusal to let the psychic slaughter recounted slip into the mode of Monty Python grammar-school surrealism. But the act of narration also disconcerts — without punch-lines, impressions, one-liners or any other bits of the manic punctuation we usually need to keep stories in harness.

As a performer, McLennan compels and commands. The wild poetry of his text and the cool fury of its expression mean that, after a few minutes, the lack of gags doesn't seem to matter. Jokes, as Laing saw, work as labour-saving devices. They help us wrap up dreads and desires rather than allowing them to unravel. With McLennan, there are few short-cuts, though the rewards are worth waiting for.

He makes the fantasies of destruction, martyrdom and revenge that haunt any lonely childhood or sour relationship present and concrete, turning them into a performance whose wit and sorrow make these inadmissible motives and memories just a little easier to bear or overcome. But he does demand patience: a willingness to hang on through the abject sadness of much of his act without hoping for a payoff, a cheap shot, an epigram. Those who find Oscar McLennan long-winded or obsessive, those who crave a fix of giggles, might try to re-learn the lost art of listening. Benjamin again: 'Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives it away.' ■

Housewatch is a great idea. Take an ordinary house and turn its windows into screens on which to project films from within the house. The spectators remain outside in the street. This particular ordinary Edwardian terraced house in Leyton, East London, had four screens. Two large windows, one up, one down, and a small bathroom window above a glazed front door. Six artists made works for this unusual multi-screen public event. The films ranged from the predictable to the genuinely revelatory, but all of them and the event itself was immensely entertaining and enjoyable.

Four of the artists made works for some conceptual house that could be anywhere. Alison Winkle's *The Red Room*, based on Jane Eyre, used the idea of the house as a place of fiction and mystery and was technically one of the best of the six using the four screens and the rooms behind them very effectively. Ian Bourn made the house a setting for romantic Mills and Boon style fantasy which is finally deflated by the mundane concerns of tiredness and the cold. George Saxon's gathering of gaudy suspicious looking cartoon characters romped through the house in a farce like burlesque of a rock video. Chris White literally turned the house into a fish tank, the rather trite idea saved by an infectious good humour. Only Tony Sinden and Lulu Quinn showed any real interest in the life of this particular house in this street in the neighbourhood. Tony Sinden's series of dog silhouettes accompanied by Indian music, made effective

comment both on the physical structure of the house and the feeling of living in such a street. Lulu Quinn's film revealed a plasterer working in the house in a *verismo* way, and used the other screens to comment on the nature of the house as a man-made place and a place of work. This too seemed far more appropriate to this house than did gothic fantasy, or easy satire on working class dreams and aspirations.

I also had reservations about the house itself and the presentation of the event. The street, although not especially narrow was not wide enough to allow the spectator to view the films as part of an ordinary street. It made us focus on that one house and on the film images with the result that it was often difficult to remember where exactly this was all happening and that it wasn't some fancy film installation in an art gallery. This problem was compounded by the street being a rather quiet siding with very little going on, no traffic and no passers-by. Except at the being, when a few curious locals came and barracked and shouted, the audience was an art audience, local people probably looked at the audience and decided it wasn't for them. This seemed to me to defeat much of the point of *Housewatch*.

I would like to see it again, but this time in a wide, busy street. I realise this will exacerbate the technical problems but the idea of *Housewatch* is quite definitely strong enough for these to be overcome. ■

Born in New York, growing up and studying in New York and California where he studied under Berio, and later studying in Africa, Steve Reich represents one of the high points of that movement to break away from the stifling traditions of Western art that characterises much of American art of the 60s and 70s.

Steve Reich is best known for the so called 'minimal music' or 'systems music' he was writing and performing throughout the 1970s. This was a music based on repeated patterns of simple rhythms usually played on percussive instruments, to a hypnotic, trance-like effect. Then in 1981 came *Tehillim* which marked a major change in his work. It employed a text, a setting of the psalms in Hebrew, it used a wider instrumentation, and most significantly it used melody and harmony, things which he had deliberately rejected throughout his career.

Prior to his first major British concert tour he talked to STEVE ROGERS about how the changes in his work came about.

DESERT PHASE

Throughout the '70s you developed a very clear, distinct, unique voice of your own and the whole kind of polyrhythmic music became very sophisticated and your reputation grew. So how did you get from that to Tehillim? How did that jump come?

First of all I wanted to do a piece on a Hebrew text. I had become very interested in my own background. I went to Africa, I studied in Africa and I learned a great deal. Actually I learned a great deal before I went to Africa from a book, actually by an Englishman, called A.M. Jones, who was a cleric and a musicologist who lived in Rhodesia as it was then. I actually met him. I was on my way to Ghana, and I was in London to get a cheap flight to Ghana, and I contacted A.M. Jones who was connected with the School of Oriental

and African Studies at the University of London. He had published a book which I had become aware of through Gunther Schuller. When I was a student of Berio's I went to a conference where Schuller was talking about writing a history of early jazz and having wanted to know what black American music was like before they came here, ie, what was African music and he found a book which had scores. Not just folkloristic descriptions of what they wore and when they did it. He mentioned this book by Jones and I went back and got the book and was knocked out by what I saw, which was repeating patterns, in what we would call 12/8, with their downbeats coming in different places. I'd heard African music and knew that it was intensely rhythmic but it could have fallen out of the sky. So to see scores of it done, and very well done, was very impressive. Going to Africa was, in a sense, following through on discovering that book. Another thing that I got whilst I was in Africa was that it was an ancient civilisation. That this music was not the work of this particular guy or that particular woman, it was the work of a whole civilisation. Here I was, Steve Reich in person, with 2000 years, or whatever, of a continent's music. I really felt that this was deep water, watch out you could drown here. A lot of people did drown. A lot of people drowned in Indian music. They got so taken up with this thing that they just drowned in the sitar strings. And Balinese music as well, which I ended up studying in California and Seattle. This is coming from a group of people who have preserved something for a whole long period of time. That it's in jeopardy, because of the tape recorder, and because I'm studying it and because there are airplanes etc. Then in 1974 I started thinking, 'I'm not African, I'm not Balinese, I'm Jewish.' So I began looking at my own background. I began studying the Hebrew language and understanding that the Hebrew language was chanted, and I didn't know anything about that. And in the 2 or 3 years I spent involved in catching up on my background I became interested in the possibility of setting a Hebrew text. At first I thought I was going to set the book of Jonah, which is actually chanted in the synagogue at Yom Kippur. It didn't need me. In the Christian tradition there are new Masses. If you write a Mass it can be done properly, even as part of the service. There is no such tradition in the synagogue. In the traditional synagogue there is one man chanting from the scriptures and that tradition is about 2500 years old. It's the preservation of that tradition that is admirable and I completely have sympathy with it. The synagogue doesn't need me, or George Gershwin, or Phil Glass, or Arnold Schoenberg or any other Jewish composer to do what it doesn't



music

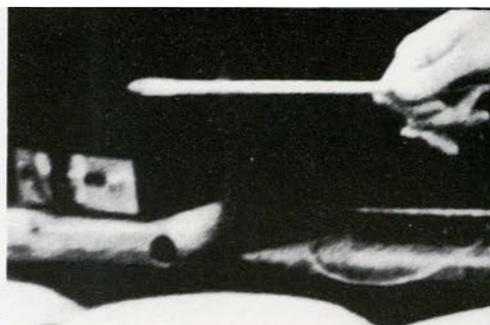


Photo courtesy Boosey & Hawkes

need. So I ended up setting parts of the psalms because its a tradition that's been lost. When you hear psalms in the synagogue they are done to imitation tunes that are bad church chorales. Just like third rate nineteenth century versions of bad imitations of Bach chorales. The only Jews who have a tradition of singing the psalms are the Yemenites and the Yemenites have left Yemen. And that tradition could easily disappear in the State of Israel which is a melting pot. So in a sense it left me free. There was no super-ego, that I had learned about musically in my musical memory to say 'this is how it should go'. So I just got a green light. So *Tehillim* was a setting of a Hebrew text. And I read through the Book of Psalms and of course a lot of it I would feel uncomfortable saying in a concert hall. So I choose those parts that I felt I could say and really mean. But I set them in Hebrew in the same way that Ezra Pound might say you don't understand Provencal poetry in translation, you understand the translator, and I felt you don't understand the psalms if you don't have them in Hebrew.

So you were as much interested in the meaning of the words as in the cultural resonance of the sound of the words?

Sure, sure. In the setting of the texts, and I hadn't set any texts since the tape pieces, and the tape pieces were more like avoiding setting a text by using found objects, a recorded voice — so I found that the sounds were forcing me — it was like they were picking me up by the scruff of the neck and saying, I need a melody, now give me a melody. So I produced melodies that came to me in the way they come to composers. And the piece came out of the rhythm of the text, just the way any composer would find them. The words singing themselves, this was not a way I had worked before.

So *Tehillim* happened and *Tehillim* was a very large piece and after touring it in Europe with 24 people I decided that I would never do such a thing again. The ensemble was getting unwieldy and that if I wanted to do pieces that size it was more practical, less ulcer-making, to simply find existing chamber orchestras and have them do it and maybe bring in some of my people.

Does this in any way threaten the special relationship which the ensemble obviously has?

No it hasn't threatened it — as a matter of fact the ensemble has had a remarkable constancy of personnel. The percussionists in particular have stayed around, mostly from 1971 or 1973. There's a community of people that I've worked with for some period of time, and they're getting older, and they're getting more well known. I've always said that they are some of the best percussionists in the world and now they're being recognised as such. It's a kind of poetic justice.

And are we going to see . . . ?

Yes, you're going to see that hard core group come back here, you certainly are. The group hasn't stopped. The pieces I did between *Octet*, and *Tehillim*, and *Desert Music*, were not primarily focused on the ensemble, yet every one of them with the exception of *Desert Music* was done by the ensemble in an expanded version. But my experience has told me that what I have that is

unique is the percussionists.

Is there going to be new music for the small ensemble?

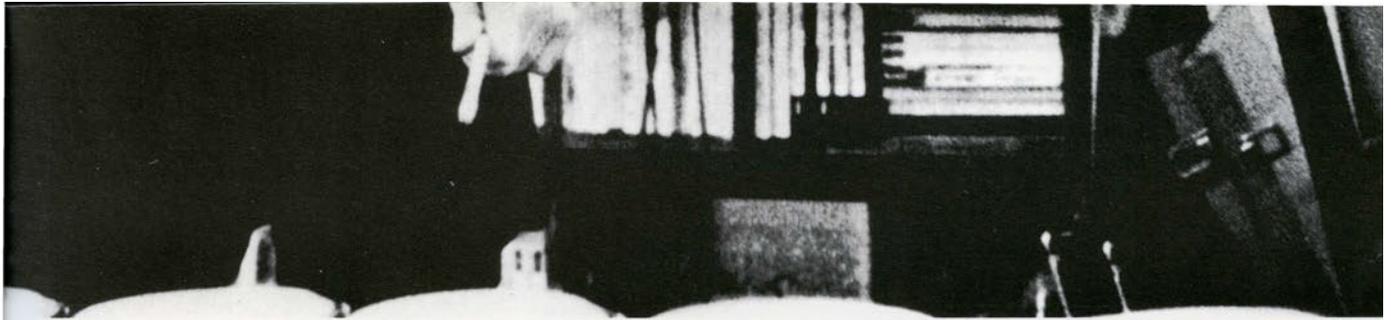
Yes, it's already done, it's coming over here. *Sextet* was a dual commission from the French Government for Nexus and for Laura Dean who will choreograph it for the Brooklyn Academy Next Wave Series. But the *Sextet* was primarily about having a whole second half for my ensemble to do in a small portable form. It is a big statement with a small force of people, and that's what we're bringing to England. The *Vermont Counterpoint* is a small piece. The New York *Counterpoint* which I just finished before I came over here is being written for Richard Stolzman, the clarinetist, to play with tape with himself. We'll do that with our group and that will come to England as a new piece. So right now there has been an effort for me to give new pieces of a small nature which we can do.

(Steve Reich then gave a detailed description of the layout of the orchestra for *Desert Music* which was being given its British debut at the Proms the next day. It is impossible to reproduce here as most of it took the form of explaining — a diagram of the orchestral plan.)

The *Desert Music* also seems to contain another big break away from the whole body of the early music which is that it has a more dramatic structure, as opposed to the gradual processes you were interested in before. There are confrontations going on in the music.

Look, we are now in a period when we are seeing a lot of new opera happening, this new-romanticism, and I have been asked to do operas and I had to demur. I'm not interested. I won't say it'll never happen. I used to say I'd never write for the orchestra but I've learnt now to just bite my tongue. But I'm certainly not an opera composer in the way Glass is. He's a person who really wants to be in the theatre. I'm not a theatre person. I may be a dance composer. That seems to be a lot truer about me. An awful lot of dancers use my music. I'm interested in dance more intensely that I am in theatre. But I chose a text which I had been interested in, or rather a poet I had been interested in, since I was 16 or 17 (William Carlos Williams). And in choosing the text I did the same thing I'd done with the psalms. I went through his works and said, 'well, now, I have to figure out exactly what I want', and I found out I was basically interested in his last ten years. Books that when they were collected together were called 'The *Desert Music*'. The form of the piece literally came out by putting the sections I wanted to use on the floor around my marimba and laying them out until I eventually saw the shape of the piece. Once I had the text, it again began to force me to do things I would never in the world have done if I hadn't had a text. And I like that. I like to get that kick in the rear that forces you into things that your pure abstract concerns with notes would not take you. And you must deal with the meaning, you can even go against it, but you've got to deal with it as some level. Or don't set a text and just use syllables instead.

The piece starts out, and, in the first section we think, 'right we're on familiar territory', and then it



stops and then we go into the text, and it comes as a surprise, a shock, and it does make you listen. But it is something which is unexpected from you.

Right well a lot of people will quote to me 'music is a gradual process'.

That always gets quoted in books.

Right. People will approach me with a reproachful, scornful air and say 'look, you said you were going to do this'. And my answer is always the same, it's that, that essay in *New Music Theory* very accurately describes everything that preceded that essay. The rules of harmony were unknown to Bach. He just followed his ear. The rules were simply distilled and written down after the fact by observing some practise. And I think it would be foolish, ugly and quasi-fascistic to write a set of rules and say 'OK, I'm going to walk that line.' It was a maniacal, single-minded concern of mine, which I maniacally, single-mindedly pursued until I felt that this was well-known territory. Beyond that I would be doing something I no longer need. I would be focussing on the way I walk, I know how to walk, and these bones are part of my body. I didn't throw those things out. I couldn't. They are part of me. But I find, happily, that they can be used in an unforeseen number of situations. That's what makes life interesting.

Are you conscious of, or does it affect you, that as your reputation has grown internationally, and there are people out there saying 'Give me more,' that there was a pressure on you to produce something that was more accessible to a wider audience. *Desert Music* is more accessible. There are more recognisable things in it for a general audience.

Perhaps so. Sometimes precisely the things that are new in terms of what I do, including more harmonic development, and more orchestration development, are precisely the things which are, quote, 'old'. Which are precisely the Western concerns which were set aside. For me they are very exciting because they were set aside for a long period of time. Now that I go back to them, I go back in a way that I could never have done as a student. I'm inventing my orchestra, and inventing my harmonic language, which probably comes out of Thelonius Monk. I think you may be accurate in describing the situation — if there's some person out of the Midlands who comes down, he may find the *Desert Music* easy to take, and *Drumming* or *Four Organs* very difficult. There are people out there who say they like my music starting with *18 Musicians*, and there are others who will say that's the last good music I wrote. And I can understand both groups. But finally I have to go to intuition.

As for the commissions I actually have been fortunate enough to — I'm not really a tremendously prolific composer, I do work slowly — and the commissions that I get are, to be honest with you, things where I try to get people to pay for things I'd like to do. And I've been fortunate enough to do that. I have been asked to do operas, and I've tried to talk them into doing something else. It isn't that I've been given a supermarket list and I've got to go out and get them and meanwhile I should have been doing my post-*Drumming* pieces. I think that there are these two kinds of groups, there are the more conservative,

or establishment type who say 'well, now, he's finally seen the light', and others who say 'Ah, he's finished, he's all washed up, he's sold us out to the conventional music.' And while I can see why people would say both these, I'm afraid that I have to — I see a lot of virtues in the *Desert Music*.

I've enjoyed what I've heard so far.

Right, I think that people have to . . . let's say for those people who obviously, like yourself, are tuned into my earlier pieces who say that there is a larger world out there. And if I can serve as a bridge for people to go back and re-establish some contact with some part of their own tradition, then perhaps I will be doing for them what I've done for myself. And that's not such a horrible thing to do. Nor is it a one way street from which there is no return. When people hear the *Sextet* they'll say 'Hm, that's not so bad.'

I see that you're using synthesisers. One of the hallmarks of your music has been a rejection of high-tech and all that that means. With some of the earlier phasing techniques, listening to it it sounds like it would have been so easy to use a batch of electronics to do that.

Why do I use synthesisers in the *Desert Music*?

Yes, and is that something you're pleased with and will continue to use?

Do you remember that I used to work with electric organ?

Yes.

Let me ask you a more important question. You've heard the *Desert Music* a couple of times, did you hear any synthesisers?

No. I didn't know that until I just saw them on the orchestra plan.

Right, exactly. The synthesisers are really — if you say electric organ people throw up their arms and say 'oh well they've stopped making them' I'm of the generation that worked with Farfisas and there ain't no Farfisas no more. Electronic keyboard instruments are constantly changing, about every three days. What I basically want is an electric organ that can double the brass. Because I ask the brass section to play very smoothly, I don't want that Harry James sound, I want them to be very smooth, but to get the volume to cover the orchestra I like the synthesiser with the brass stop, just to put that sound level up a little. Also to double the strings. In addition to having the strings set up in these sections, if the keyboard players double them, it supports them, and gives them something, so they can feel there's something going for them, it gives them that little bit of complicated counterpoint, etched clearly, and it's very easy to do on a keyboard, and if it's coming out of the speaker at the back of the orchestra it's helpful. It gives a slight lustre to the sound but it's something you might only notice if we turned it off. You didn't hear it as such but you take it in. I like it. It's very useful and it's something I've been doing for years. It's not synthesisers with a capital S. Again they occur in *Sextet*, because electric organs are not available. The answer to your question is basically NO. I will use synthesisers to do what is basically an organ part. I have no further interest in electronics. I once went to IRCAM and I was able to do the slowing down of speech that I wanted to do in the 60s, and it was ▶

music

interesting — you know — but I quit doing it. My interest in traditional instruments has not changed. The microphone is very important to me. I'm a microphone junkie and I'm proud of it. The chorus in *Desert Music* is singing in a small, quote, 'Old Music Style'. I don't want a chorus of 200 people because that would give you that big, elephantine sound that would not allow the little agile movements the chorus must make. So they have to be amplified to be heard over the music. And I've been doing that for years.

Great. Finally, the last trick question. Do you consider your music to be erotic?

Erotic? Yes, definitely, I always have.

I'm glad you said that because I always have too.

It don't mean a thing if it aint got that thing.

Steve Reich is touring Britain with his ensemble in late January/early February. (See Ads and Preview for dates.)

This interview represents only a little more than a third of the entire interview recorded. An off-print of the full text of the interview is available from Performance Magazine, price £1 including postage. ●



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'Down with the Tango and Parsival' roared Marinetti in 1914. Until recently most of the avant-garde would agree. Now, notes DAVID BRIERS, Opera — not content with grabbing most of the arts money — is creeping towards not only populism, but fashionable acceptance by the art world. But the unsung heroes and heroines of anti-Opera have always been with us, subverting the tawdry glamour and the silly voices:

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF ANTI-OPERA

There are, according to a *Classical Music Weekly* correspondent, many people who 'clearly enjoy going to the theatre and concerts, and yet are baffled by opera'. I am one of them. I 'understand' opera, but I am baffled by it. I can take a Thomas Tallis mass, or a Shostakovich piano quintet with equanimity. I can positively enjoy the first performance of an oboe sonata by a pupil of Hindemith. But a visit to the opera leaves me with a slow burn of exasperation, spleen, jaundice, or giggles.

I do go to the opera, but not in London, because where I live in Cardiff we have the Welsh National Opera, which, says the *Daily Telegraph*, 'can surpass anything found in London' (and it is the only arts organisation in Cardiff, by the way, to have its own specially built staff restaurant). And I live within walking distance of their performances, so I go when I like the composer — Wagner, Janacek, Martinu — though any positive enjoyment of the performance is always achieved in spite of the musical, dramatic, and social protocol of 'opera'.

Now to sit in a darkened theatre and hear the first rumblings from the orchestra pit at the very beginning of Wagner's *Rhinegold*, building up into a spine-tingling wash of massive orchestral numinosity, is an experience ill duplicated by radio or even CD. One is prepared for the great *gesamtkunstwerk*. But then the curtain rises to reveal the world of 'Opera'.

Firstly, there is the singing. More often than not, the highly trained bel ▶





Opera Factory

Photo: Malcolm Crowthers

canto opera singing voice is, to my mind, unpleasant, when compared to, say, Aretha Franklin or Amalia Rodrigues. This is a reaction I share with Beachcomber, whose description I relish of a diva whose performance attracted the attention of the police, who 'thinking that mad butchers had occupied the house for slaughter purposes, arrived with documentary proof that a clause in the lease stated that cattle must not be slaughtered on the premises. There were laughing explanations and the fun went on.'

Then there is the 'silliness' of opera; the imbalance between conventionally understood artifice and encouraged suspension of disbelief, and between musical and dramatic skills, simple exhibitionism and attempted psychological introspection. However seriously one tries to take an opera, as soon as the frame of reference of Anna Russell, Billy Dainty, or H.M. Bateman slips into the mind, it always ends up seeming hilariously funny. *Vorsprung* isn't always *durch technik* in Wagner, and a Ring Cycle without occasional moments of pure bathos is not worth its salt. At the WNO's recent *Siegfried*, the eponymous hero, after struggling manfully for many minutes to remove the breastplate of a sleeping Valkyrie, revealing a large pair of breasts, declaims, as if there could be any question, 'It's not a man', to audience laughter. During the same season's *Götterdämmerung*, an ambulance raced past the theatre with its siren wailing just as Siegfried lay dying on the stage, and all opera reviewers who were present mentioned this without fail. When the hero cannot quite find the right niche in the fake rocks to park his spear, or the 'Hi-ho' chorus of returning Gibichungs reminds us unfailingly of Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs, are we watching an opera, or observing its ironies, at a distance?

And then opera has a major inherent design fault, which doesn't help. It's a bit like watching the TV with the sound turned down and trying to fathom the plot — because you cannot hear the words. I used to keep this fact to myself until I discovered several concerned references to this long-standing and unresolved paradox in the writings of real music critics, and now I am quite open about it.

Opera is not, therefore, the ultimate total-artwork its champions claim. Opera is a 'genre'. We can take it or leave it, but unlike other genres, such as limited edition books of poetry or topographical watercolours, opera has a voracious appetite for time, money,

labour and space, and has become established and institutionalised, and very nearly self-perpetuating.

Class. Opera is riddled with it. From the Earl of Harewood ('for Harewood opera is primordial', says the *Sunday Times*), to the Priestley report giving more money to opera in the face of arts cuts in other areas (like a the police conducting an enquiry into itself), to business sponsorship from clearing banks, oil, life insurance, tobacco, Sainsbury's, to the marketing of T-shirts designed by Zandra Rhodes for the Royal Opera House.

I don't suppose I will ever go to Glyndebourne, but even at the New Theatre in Cardiff during the long interval in *Götterdämmerung* or *Tristan*, out come the freezer bags, the tupperware and wine glasses are balanced on the edge of the balcony, and a scene of food-snobbery ensues which would delight Nancy Mitford, Ann Barr, or Posy Simmonds. As Beachcomber said about opera, 'If you hate this kind of thing, there is always the Royal Academy and Cowes.'

Opera takes itself too seriously, and operates with missionary zeal, like the Jesuits (a map in the Opera Study Group's report for the Arts Council on Opera Provision Outside London, is entitled 'Opera Spheres of Influence', like 'The Spread of Christianity'). These days opera companies will do anything to give their product 'wider appeal'. Often, this comprises the writing of 'pop' synopses such as Reading Hexagon's description of Rossini's *Italian Girl in Algiers* as giving us 'comic characters and awkward situations as the sophisticated elegant Italian Girl runs rings around the Boy of Algiers' (but is that why you go and see a Rossini opera — wouldn't a Brian Rix farce be a better bet?). Occasionally this sort of thing descends to the pits of the 'arts marketing' nether world, as did the Welsh National Opera's proclamation that 'like *Dallas* or *Dynasty*, the *Ring* tells the story of the conflict between love and power' (thus causing Wagner to turn in his grave and the Teutonic knights to stir from their ageless sleep). That comes from the WNO's magazine, *The Figaro*, and they also publish a children's comic which includes *La Bohème* in *Classics Illustrated* comic-strip form. Elsewhere, TV programmes are made to 'help people avoid being frightened by opera', and have you seen the New Sadlers Wells posters on the underground, with certain telling words deleted so that you can still read them, apparently appealing to established

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snobbery and the proles at the same time? Throughout all of this, we are continually assured that opera is nothing to worry about, that it will not change us, and will not be different to seeing a touring play with Denis Waterman and Rula Lenska in it.

As for the opera productions themselves, they have lately been doing anything to bring themselves into the wider sphere of attention. Semi-nudity, of the 'quick flash' variety, such as was once interpolated unflinchingly in every early 'X' film to guarantee an audience, has lately been *de rigueur* in opera, particularly to liven up the more straight-laced classical operas (I remember a production of the *Coronation of Poppaea* with an uncomfortable looking allegorical group of semi-nude dancers). And ever since Patrice Chereau's 'Industrial Revolution' look version of the *Ring*, East German and Romanian directors and designers have been imported to give opera political credibility and to design sets for *Rigoletto* that look a bit like Impact Theatre, or direct a version of *Carmen* in military fatigues (they referred to this at the WNO as a 'MASH hit'). One step beyond all this are such companies as David Freeman's *Opera Factory*, and *Lyrische Komodie* in Holland, but however fresh may be their reinterpretations of classic operas and productions of new operas, *Opera Factory's* claim to represent the 'very

antithesis of the grander opera companies' is questionable.

The music critic Paul Driver opened his review of Philip Glass's opera *Akhnaten* thus: 'The word "opera" is being redefined all over the world by composers loath to lose it. There was a time when it was a dirty word — Boulez and Stockhausen . . . saw to that. Now the latter is well into the composition of a seven-night cycle of operas, *Licht*, part of which have been seen in such places as La Scala, Milan; while Boulez, who wanted opera houses burnt, is rumoured to be planning a work for the new one in Paris.'

The way things are at the moment, even twentieth century composers who did not write operas are not safe from having operas written about them, like Percy Grainger, about whom Robert Dickinson and Steve Wade are currently engaged upon writing an opera called *Blue Eyed English*. I don't know if anyone is writing an opera about Charles Ives, but I wouldn't be at all surprised.

In the world of independent theatre, new music, performance, and art galleries, 'opera' has become unhealthy chic. Re-born with Syberberg's film version of *Parsifal* in Germany, where it accompanied the rise and rise of neo-heroic painting, 'opera' pervades the world of Pina Bausch and her acolytes, and an opera singer or two is usually included in those occasional French and Italian confections of performance art and new painting put on by and for rich people.

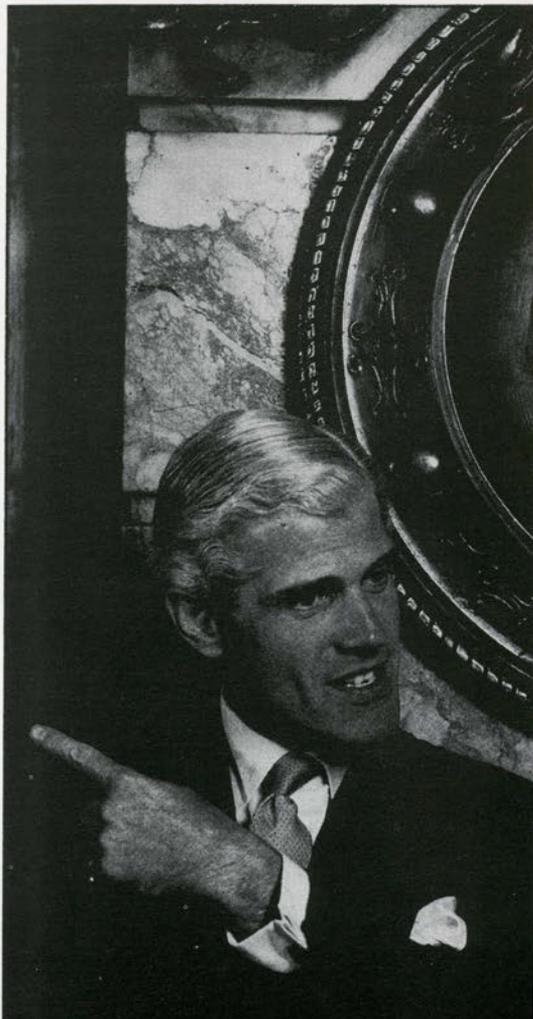
David Hockney plays the rapid operas of Donizetti on his Walkman, a 'musical' version of *Figaro* opens in London, the Liverpool Everyman puts on an 'instant' *Tosca*, Malcolm Maclaren and others cash in, artist Steve Willats discovers the Earls Court 'Night Opera' people (see *Performance* No.36), and young men congregate in specialist record shops not a million miles from St. Martins Lane. Opera is *dans le vent*. Germano Celant curates a symposium in Los Angeles called *Art as Opera*, and *High Performance* magazine announces an 'allegorical opera comique' by performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, and a sculptural performance tableau by fashionable painter Robert Longo, featuring an opera singer and two men sensuously wrestling in the posture of statues. Now that's quite enough, thank you. Snap out of it.

'Down with the Tango and Parsifal!' was one of Marinetti's 1914 Futurist slogans. Marinetti's description of *Parsifal* is just the sort of thing to make

1985 opera fetishists salivate: ' . . . Tears and fake pearls of Mary Magdalen *en décolleté* at Maxim's. Polyphonic purulence of the wounds of Amfortas. The snivelling somnolence of the Knights of the Holy Grail. Ridiculous Satanism of Kundry . . . Passéism! Passéism! Enough!' 'Ce n'est pluus chic!' added Marinetti. Plus ça change, however, as many who should know better escape into 'grand opera' as once they might have become converts to Roman Catholicism.

Is there an 'Anti-world' of opera, where operatic quarks and neutrinos defy cultural gravity? Such a world might include those operas written by ▶

Class. Opera is riddled with it.



ffs people.

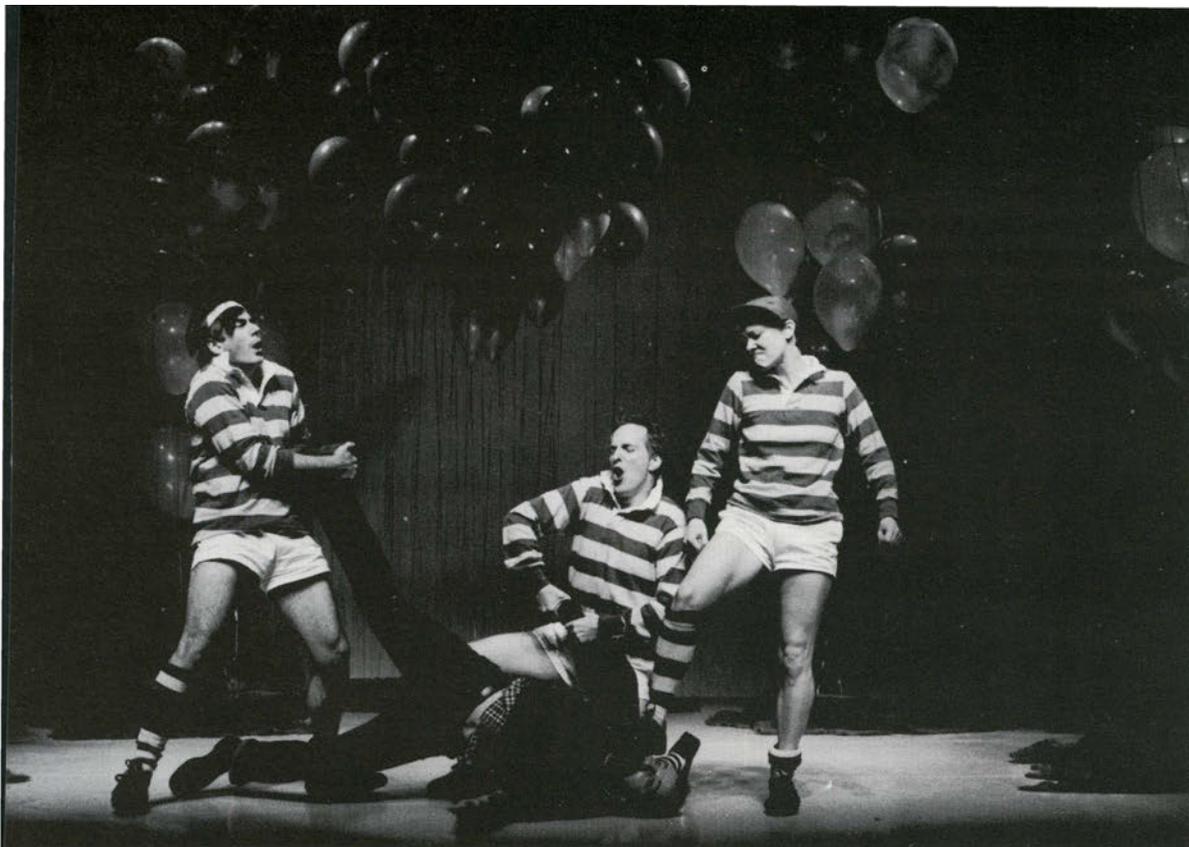


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Covent Garden's financial difficulties are well known and it is clear that we must earn more money than currently forecast if we are to achieve a satisfactory outcome to the present financial year.

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John Tooley
Sir John Tooley
General Director

Opera Factory

naive or untutored composers, 'outsider' operas, juvenilia, operas-within-operas, unfinished operas, unstarted operas, imaginary operas, improvised operas, operas without music, without words, things called operas which are not operas at all. Anti-opera would be resistant to definition because, as Jean Dubuffet said (about art), 'Its best moments are when it forgets what it is called.'

What might a *History of Anti-Opera* include? It might include *Pantagruel*, the 5 act opera started but never finished by Alfred Jarry and Claude Terrasse (the composer of comic operettas who also wrote the music for *Ubu Roi*. Jarry himself later began an opera buffa called *The Pope's Mustard Pot*, which included a chorus of 'constipated faithful'); or *Genevieve de Brabant*, Erik Satie's miniature opera for marionettes.

It might include *Le Testament de Villon*, the 'opera' by poet Ezra Pound, which 'ignores five centuries of singing art and opera', and which, when it was performed at the 1980 Holland Festival, had for a Dutch music critic the impact of 'the discovery of Neanderthal man for the 19th century palaeontologist. We had, all along, known of its existence and we knew that it was more primitive than we; and then, once we had dug it up, we had the sensation of being closer to the essence of music theatre.'

It would certainly include Darius Milhaud's three 'opéras-minutes' of 1927, which are real operas, but over with in seven minutes each. And Kurt Schwitters' 'grotesque opera' *Der Zusammenstoss* (The Collision), a multimedia spectacular never performed. It might include Eugene Ionesco's play *The Bald Prima Donna*, because it has nothing at all to do with a bald prima donna, and Jacques Auduberti's *Spoken Opera*.

Or Boris Blacher's 1953 *Abstract Opera*, the first performance of which caused a riot, and which has been described as 'the worst opera ever written'; 'an opera', a performance piece by Emmett Williams, which caused a riot twice in Germany in the early 60s, the second time when it was performed on the 20th anniversary of the plot to assassinate Hitler; Nam Jun Paik's *Robot-Opera: Kill Pop/Art* of 1964, or the *Robopera* written by three Californian artists which includes a part for a fully automated life-size robot of Andy Warhol.

Or the imaginary all-woman opera *Emily Butter* described in Henry Reed's radio play *The Private Life of Hilda Tablet* (1954), wherein its librettist says: '... the whole trouble with *Emily Butter* is you can't hear a bloody word anybody sings.'

Or *St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio* (or *Brother Francis' Lambchops*), the unperformed opera in 2 Acts by Stefan Themerson, author, philosopher, and publisher of the Gaberbocchus Press; or Tom Phillips' *Irma*, Op. XII, 'an opera' consisting of fragments of treated text, inviting reconstructions of a hypothetical whole 'as if they were the only surviving fragments of an ancient opera, or fragments of eye and ear witness accounts of such'; or Judith Weir's *King Harald's Sage*, first performed at Dumfries Music Club in 1979, a 'Grand opera in three acts for unaccompanied solo soprano, singing eight roles' (including that of the Norwegian army), and lasting about ten minutes; or *Perseus and Andromeda*, an opera by the astronomer Patrick Moore (first performed in 1974 by Shoreham Light Opera Company at Shoreham Civic Centre), who has said of his music, 'Any music I write is of the 1875, not the 1975, type'. ●

A new spirit of neo-Brechtianism is abroad in mainstream pop, and with it the usual misnomers and misconceptions about the East German playwright and his composers, Weill and Eisler. But pop has lost its capacity for social impact, apart from harnessing its immense spending power to famine aid projects. NICK COLEMAN guides the recent tourist through the city of Mahagonny, and finds stalwarts of the New Sobriety suspicious of the revival:



LOVE

NOT JUST SONGS ABOUT

AND THE RAIN FALLING ON YOUR HEAD

The frontispiece to

John Willett's 'Brecht in Context', published a couple of years ago, consists of two maps of 'The English-speaking world according to Bertolt Brecht — On Willett's Projection; scale: epic'. The first map is vague in outline, in fact almost devoid of coast. It depicts 'The Great Cities'. Separated by vast vacant areas — labelled simply Prairie, Savannahs and Pacific and Atlantic Ocean — the cities of London, New York, Mahagonny, and Cold Chicago sit like bruises on a pale face. The scale being epic, London can be seen in sufficient detail to distinguish Lambeth, Waterloo Bridge, West India Dock in the east and Highgate Heath in the north. Hanging, detached, in another empty space below is Southampton. New York is delineated simply as Bronx and Manhattan, while Mahagonny, in a diagonally opposite corner, covers an approximation of the southern states. These, in turn, are joined to Cold Chicago and Alaska at the top of the map by a thin tendril labelled River Mississippi.

The second map, conforming more to cartographical convention, is of 'Outposts Of Empire' and shows the teeth of Africa, India, Burma surrounded by Persia, Tibet and China. Picked out are such significant outposts

as Orange River, Szechwan, Mandalay and, of course, Surabaya. Coastline is drawn in because coastline is important in strange, exotic places. It's a way of telling where you are.

But don't be misled. These are scientific maps. They are maps of significances, of activity, of stories. They show the world exclusively in terms of people.

We might easily draw a map in a similar style that featured New Orleans, Tulsa, San Francisco, Route 66, New York (in great detail), Nashville, Memphis, LA, Phoenix... packed tight into one corner you might place London, with Waterloo Station, Abbey Road and Carnaby Street; Liverpool, bisected by the Mersey; and occupying an unshaped, abstract and thoroughly bruise-like segment of the map: Ethiopia.

Though following the same principles of Willett's Projection, this map shows a different world; a place given substance by the story-telling indices of pop culture: one of the two biggest grossing popular entertainment industries in, funnily enough, the world.

You'd think from the way that mainstream pop music has inscribed Bertolt Brecht that he was a prototypical gender-bender glamour-boy, thrown up by a curious blending of ▶

music

populist 1920s expressionism and Germanic austerity. True, his first play *Baal* meandered expressionistically around the theme of asocial individualism, and the playwright did maintain a fiercely anti-authoritarian attitude throughout his life; but the Brecht enshrined like an icon by the likes of David Bowie and Jim Morrison of *The Doors* (and name-dropped as a passport to a certain hi-tech bohemian cool) is nothing more than a cipher. A justification, even; far distant from the fastidious, ex-protestant whose basic instinct of revulsion was for man's inhumanity to man, and whose life was spent regenerating some of the basic tenets of Marxism into a revolutionary art. We should not be surprised, either, by the fact that the artistic connection most vigorously exploited by pop is that of Brecht with Kurt Weill; he who, more than any other German emigre musician, adjusted to American culture with real facility and ended up providing the canon of Great American Popular song with more than its fair share of classics ('Speak Low', 'September Song' etc).

Nor should it be surprising that at a time which sees pop music at its lowest ebb (in other words a time when image-package- and altar-building are buttressed by little musical creativity to give those processes substance or a cutting edge) we are beginning to see a real interest in the genuine Brechtian article. Last summer the Festival of New Music at the Bloomsbury Theatre in London was well attended. Particularly successful were two separate performances that addressed the business of performing songs in a popular vein from an overtly, and well thought-through Brechtian angle. Similarly, a 20-piece Big Band with accompanying slide-projections called *The Happy End* (after the Brecht/Weill/Hauptmann musical play) garnered a considerable following and critical acclaim as they slogged up and down the country playing everywhere from Miner's Benefits to the Purcell Room on the South Bank.

Of course, this does not herald a major breakthrough into the international market with Handsome Bert adorning the front cover of *Smash Hits* and command performances before the slender ankles of the Princess of Wales, but it is significant that people are buying the records and turning up time and time again at insalubrious venues to be engaged in this way. More important still is the fact these performances and records are infiltrating the edges of the pop market and being 'consumed' as an alternative to its blandishments. The secret is in the gest.

Gist and gesture

Brecht called his theatre 'epic'. It was a theatre to challenge bourgeois

conceptions of how and why theatre should be consumed; to examine and include the position of the audience in the production continuum; to expose the psychological tradition of drama as a reactionary narcotic of the establishment; to bring forward the social complex of the drama as a correct revolutionary measure. Brecht's major works were not founded on didacticism but on dialectics.

'The epic theatre is chiefly interested in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant (typical).'

The Brechtian 'gest' (gestus) is the dramatic mechanism by which the morass of signs, symbols and red-herrings that constitute a performance (both collective and individual) are fashioned to articulate those socio-historically significant attitudes. The gest can be as minute an articulation as the manner in which a loaf of bread is sliced, as broad (grundgestus) as the overall articulation of meaning in an episode or whole play. It is inextricable from both text *and* performance and binds the two in the same way that, semantically, it binds the words 'gesture' and 'gist' into one sense (Willett uses the obsolete English word 'gest', meaning 'bearing, carriage, mien' as a compromise translation of the German).

A Brechtian performer must investigate the gestic possibilities of his or her performance as the centre of the performance itself, the crucible of its meaning. It involves the simultaneous recognition of the relationship between performer and audience with, in the case of a play, the full significance of that performance within the totality of the play. There can be no dissociation of *The Moment* from *The Whole* as is commonplace in the psychological tradition of drama typified by the American Method School. Emotion becomes a tool for meaning, not a device for precipitating catharsis. The gest is the heart of the epic theatre and, with its sibling mechanism *Verfremdungseffekt* (approximately; 'Alienation Effect'), the structural feature that, more than anything else, separates Brecht from the Socialist-Realist tradition which seeks to put a 'reality' onto a stage or screen instead of an argument.

Zonks

Both as Alienation Effect and gest, Brecht made copious use of music in his theatre. Breaking up the action into episodes, interrupting the flow of narrative with irony, making summing-up gestic articulations of an argument, music became as important an element of the epic theatre as the performers, the lighting, the set and the text.

'Gestic music is that music which allows the actor to exhibit certain basic gestic on the stage. So-called "cheap"

music, particularly that of the cabaret and the operetta, has for some time been a sort of gestic music. Serious music, however, still clings to lyricism, and cultivates expression for its own sake.'

In identifying 'cheap' music Brecht was chiefly identifying the form of the song. It's certainly significant that he chose to reject the German word 'lied' in favour of the English 'song' (or 'Zonk' as Eric Bentley liked to pronounce it in parody of German mispronunciation); to use the German word would have been, in Brecht's eyes, to connote the bourgeois 'lyricism' which so excited his disfavour. As Bentley points, out a Zonk in a Brecht play is an individual item, distinct from its context, 'like an individual number in vaudeville.' It is a compression, a microcosm, a thing unto itself whose essential form lends itself to gestic performance. On Hanns Eisler's music for *Roundheads and Pointedheads* Brecht commented: "Eisler wrote *song* music . . . it avoids narcotic effects, chiefly by linking the solution of musical problems to the clear and intelligible underlining of the political and philosophical meaning of each poem."

The anti-establishmentarian iconoclast in Brecht also enjoyed the way that songs can have direct social impact. Writing about the music for *The Threepenny Opera* he commented: 'The tenderest and most moving love-song in the play described the eternal, indestructible mutual attachment of a procurer and his girl. The lovers sang, not without nostalgia, of their little home the brothel. In such ways the music, just because it took up a purely emotional attitude and spurned none of the stock narcotic attractions, became an active collaborator in the stripping bare of the middle class corpus of ideas. It became, so to speak, a muckraker, an informer, a nark.' Brecht was anticipating, at least twenty years early, the way in which pop music would make its impact. It's particularly interesting when you consider that his intention with *The Threepenny Opera* was to show 'the close relationship between the emotional life of the bourgeois and that of the criminal world.'

Raking muck

White Pop music is only socially significant when, either, it makes money for a cause outside its own industry (Ethiopia, Namibia etc.) or, very simply, when it rakes muck. (Black musics must remain untouched here for reasons of space; despite the fact that Black music was the single greatest influence on the formal evolution of White Pop).

The reason why pop has lost its capacity for social impact is that it has now been fully integrated, pariahs and all, into the media establishment. Pop

stars bandy words like 'show biz' and 'industry' and 'product' as never before; they are now fully educated in the industrial techniques of their particular brand of the entertainment media. The reason is simple: there are no more shocks to be had; it means something slightly different to be a pop star in the middle of an economic recession when your audience can no longer afford to be shocked; and anyway, your ammunition has all been used before.

It's now more than eight years since the Sex Pistols did their bit of swearing on TV; video has folded pop culture neatly into TV culture; radical noise (Crass; Neubaten, Test Dept. etc) exist comfortably and consciously as a marginal 'art'; Boy George et al have made the notion of sexual ambivalence once and for all cuddly; the Royal Family includes at least one avowed Duran Duran fan. Short of eating *real* dead babies and *actually* assaulting Mrs Thatcher, pop can no longer make us blink.

Those who smelt a rat over the Live Aid charity extravaganza, only smelt a mouse. It wasn't the smug, self-congratulatory, guilt-assuaging politic of the thing that so upset certain critics; it was the fact that, simply, here was pop music unashamedly with its trousers round its collective ankles (and it's important that the *whole* of the white pop world was represented) in a state of tamed acquiescence to a media-controlled consensus. To the public, Bob Geldof's vigorous cussing was seen not as an outrage but as a natural discharge of righteous ire, whilst a cavalcade of appropriately down-dressed superstars paraded their moral virtue like the pillars of the community they are. Here was pop music demonstrating its integration into what Brecht would have called the bourgeois world and also making lots and lots of money for a deserving cause.

Someone chastised me recently with the argument that the Rolling Stones, in all their snot-nosed, muck raking pomp of the early sixties, would still have contributed to Live Aid. That is an irrelevant question. The point is, surely, that in 1964 Live Aid could not possibly have existed. Live Aid is an entirely contemporary symbol of the differences that exist between the pop cultures of then and now. If our society made some use of pop in the 1960s, then we should rejoice that someone else can make use of it now.

If pop has lost its capacity for muck-raking, at the same time it has forgotten how to be even the slightest bit gestic. Elvis Presley, The Rolling Stones, The Sex Pistols, all in their early prime, adopted socially significant attitudes not merely with their songs, but with their faces, bodies, rhetoric, and the way they made money. Their 'performance' was themselves and the way that corpus rubbed against the 'middle class corpus of ideas'. Certainly they were vulgar, ►



Happy End — the genuine Brechtian article?



music

but in no sense does that vulgarity have a place in the current pop continuum. Nowadays the objective of pop existence is to sublimate the social complex (except when it is at a safe distance, and then make as much noise about it as possible), to make the mechanisms of social meaning invisible. Much the same as Hollywood, really. Pop has always been about its own packaging — Stones, Pistols, whoever — but what it abjectly fails to do now is relate that packaging to anything outside itself. Pop music can only now be about pop.

If evidence were needed, the grandest totem of pop music has become the yuppie iconolatry of upward mobility: free competition, the myth of Success, the theology of market forces — all the clichés of Thatcher/Reaganism. Capitalism has never been made so hip as by the corporation glamour of the ZTT organisation; the home of Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Grace Jones, Propaganda and, with massive irony, a 'chanteuse' by the name of Anne Pigalle who trades on Neo-Weimar cabaret iconography and has been labelled in some quarters as being Brechtian! This is all narcotic. Through its form, content and pitch in the market-place pop has become the single most coherent paradigm of the way in which we have become an American colony. Sadly, it seems that this has always been its destiny.

Give them stick

Brecht was (and is) important, more than anything else, for the simple reason that he penetrated deeply into the shadowed mechanics of art and its subject: people. In his search for a revolutionary art — an art that, more than merely interpreting the world, participated in the changing of it — he was highly successful in isolating the cogs, flywheels and mainspring of the machine in such a way as to expose the way the components worked to form a whole. Crucially, he included the audience as part of that whole. With his theories on theatre, he engaged on a life's work of re-engineering and fine-tuning; it would be ludicrous to think that he created an absolute theory or, for that matter, one that could be glibly re-applied outside its proper sphere of existence. Alchemy is for mystics, magicians and mad professors.

Simply, the attraction of what might be loosely termed Brechtian music has a lot to do with the way in which that music addresses the disjunction between the pop machine and its human 'consumers'. Certainly, Dagmar Krause and Agnes Bernelle, the two women who performed so successfully at the Bloomsbury Theatre last summer, are not trying to impose wholesale the Brechtian rubric onto an audience of vacant-eyed Wham!-watchers — for a start their audience thus far is largely

made up of the converted. Instead, they have located a thread of purpose in their 'texts' and performances that an audience cannot help but recognise as a significant movement away from the deadly clutch of music conceived, packed and delivered as a celebration of the profits of consumerdom. Their performances of 'song', self-integrated and *accessible*, are gestic. The audience, included in the substance of the performance, is stirred by the excitement of Meaning.

Dagmar Krause is known in this country as the extraordinarily flexible and fractious voice that acted as a prism for the music of Slapp Happy, Henry Cow and the Art Bears. Throughout the seventies and early eighties those groups inhabited the obscure fringes of 'serious' rock music and the avant-garde. They retain their cult status and worth as a genuinely challenging, sometimes terrifying obverse to the mainstream; even if the noise they made could hardly be termed 'popular'. Since then, as a solo figure she has collaborated with Brechtian music specialist Jason Osborn in performances of *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *The Rise and Fall of The City of Mahagonny* (both Brecht/Weill) and now, their current project, *Songs of Change*: exclusively, stripped performances of the songs of Brecht, Weill and Eisler.

'I've wanted to do these songs for years. Way back, in Germany, people used to come up and tell me I sounded like Lotte Lenya. I didn't have a clue what they were talking about; I was fourteen. Later I checked out who this Lotte Lenya person was and got more and more interested in Brecht. Now I feel ready to do his songs.' Being a native of Hamburg, and having been brought up on classical music and the avant-garde, Krause feels that this is the music of her roots.

'I have a feeling for how the words and music fit together, what they're trying to say. They are still relevant today in so many ways. Also, the music still has to be discovered. Until now, it's been very much a question of it lying in drawers, being the property of theatre performances, a certain cultural elite; completely *not* what Brecht, Eisler and Weill were about. They wanted a big appeal and to be far reaching.'

Brecht used popular style, but only as a point of reference, a tool; never merely as a means of attraction.

'Oh yes. It's important not to lose what is being said in the songs. It's all very well doing them on the whoopee street-band level — it's a lot of fun and all of that — but for me, that's not hitting it where it should be hit. The only way for me to do them is to look at what they're about, look at what's going on around here' (she waves her arms around to indicate Brixton where she lives) 'and *really* give them stick. Do them *now*, not in any stylised form; whoopee street-band, pop song or

whatever. That is to detract from their meaning . . .'

Kurt Weill wanted to exploit actor's amateurism as singers. Is it important not to sound trained like an opera singer?

'Ja! Once you have that training it becomes stylised. All you can hear in it is opera!'

Make politics swing

Agnes Bernelle was trained both as an actress and an opera singer. Where the latter technique is conspicuous in its absence from *A Woman, Her Travels and the Songs in Her Suitcase*, the former is used quite deliberately as a means of shaping and dramatizing those songs. The daughter of a Berlin theatrical entrepreneur, she was 'born into the cultural and political hotbed of pre-war Nazi Germany.' Where Krause's performance is etched with a stark Present, Bernelle brings fragments of a knowing nostalgia into a more highly-wrought 'show'. Her thorough understanding of Brecht and his context means that she is at ease with the way he used strategy. Over a terrible line to Dublin, where she lives, we touched on the songs. 'Take *Surabaya Johnny* for instance. It's highly theatrical and a little sentimental. Without being mawkish or going with the sentiment, if you do it with a rueful smile, you wring peoples heart-strings. Brecht doesn't want catharsis with weeping, laughing and then going away and forgetting all about it. A true Brechtian performance should be like, say, a mustard seed. You take it home and suddenly, the next day, you start thinking . . . and it grows.'

Matt Fox of the monstrous The Happy End ('Our aim: to make politics swing') recognises an untapped nostalgia, growing out of the recent success of London's cabaret scene, as one source of the interest in this tradition of songs and performance. 'Also, they are great tunes and their form has never really been worked on. The Happy End use that style as a process of learning, a springboard to go further. It's certainly a white tradition, cross-fertilized with the idea of jazz that these guys (Weill etc) never heard 'till they got to the States . . . I always think of it as a European attempt to come to terms with American cultural colonialism . . . Brecht isn't just 'Germanic', he's human. That's something the songs have: a human dimension; applying that dimension to big, big things. Those historical problems that still haven't gone away.'

The map changes

A&M Records have just released a compilation album consisting of interpretations of the songs of Kurt Weill by such luminaries as Sting, Lou Reed, Marianne Faithfull and Carla



Agnes Bernelle — born into the cultural and political hotbed of pre-war Nazi Germany



'Those historical problems that still haven't gone away'

Bley. Outstanding are the performances of 'Surabaya Johnny' by none other than Dagmar Krause and 'What Keeps Mankind Alive?' by Tom Waits, one musician from the American rock mainstream who continues to re-examine the form. Interestingly, the album features a lot of material from Weill's later, American period. Matt Fox, with whom I spoke before its release, is suspicious.

'God knows why Sting, Lou Reed and co are doing it. It sounds to me like what happened when A&M did the same thing with Thelonious Monk a year ago: a bit of a re-couping job. As far as I can tell, a lot of the album is stuff from Weill's last ten years when he was on Broadway, working with Jerome Kern, Ira Gershwin . . . mega-people; the American showbiz establishment. Weill was a German intellectual like Lang, or more properly Sirk, who thought they could really work in America. Brecht found he couldn't really. His problems were Old World

problems, European ones. His view of the States was a little simplistic, while Weill's was more pragmatic. He hitched his wagon to American culture.'

As the rock and pop consumer systems continue to reinvent past glories to sustain demand for a redundant product, the map changes.

The 'Old World', European culture, must continue to change proportionately. It's a struggle, but one that can also be sustained; albeit for very different reasons. If Black music can expand its horizons and impact, as it has done through a serious contemplation of its cultural roots, then there is every reason for Europe to discover new strength in its cultural figures. The music of Krause, Bernelle, The Happy End — call it Brechtian, Neo-Weimar or what you will — is about finding answers to the complex problem of being alive.

Dagmar Krause muttered something about time not to just sing songs about love and the rain falling on your head. ●

Discography

SLAPP HAPPY . . . *Desperate Straights* (Virgin)
ART BEARS . . . *Hopes and Fears/The World As It Is Today* (Re)
AGNESS BERNELLE . . . *Father's Lying Dead On The Ironing Board* (Imp)
THE HAPPY END . . . *There's Nothing Quite Like Money* (Circus)
ERIC BENTLEY . . . *Songs And Poems Of Bertolt Brecht* (Folkways)
 . . . *Songs Of Hanns Eisler* (Folkways)
TOM WAITS . . . *Rain Dogs* (Island)

Bibliography

'Brecht On Theatre' . . . *Translated and edited by John Willett* (Methuen)
'Brecht In Context' . . . *John Willett* (Methuen)
'The Brecht Commentaries' . . . *Eric Bentley* (Methuen)
Poems 1913-56 . . . *Bertolt Brecht* (Methuen)

Special thanks to Viv Gardner.

music

PETER CULSHAW

NO TIME

'It is easy to be beautiful it is difficult to appear so'

(Frank O'Hara, *Meditation in an Emergency*.)

The Queen of the Night: aggressive fantasy figure (right) Bartlett & Whitmore (below)

Photo: Steven White



There are supposed to be machines used by phone tappers that can pick up key words like IRA, anarchy, revolution and bombs. With Neil Bartlett, director of the ICA's Christmas show *The Magic Flute* the key words would be *love, glamour, beautiful*, followed by *pleasure, death and sex*. On my interview tape the word sausages comes up a lot, but that was only because Neil's lunch order took a long time coming in the cafe where we met for lunch.

'I am the least difficult of men; all I want is boundless love' (Frank O'Hara).

The Magic Flute has a cast of 18. There are 7 musicians playing live, there are at least 7 big scene changes, trapdoors, yards and yards of pink netting, lots of costume changes, plastic flowers, trapdoors, smoke machines and (I think we have an exclusive) ice cream on sale in the interval. Men fall in love with men, women with women, men with women, women with men, birds fall in love with each other, people fall in love with inanimate objects. People pretend to be animals and musical instruments. 'The Magic Flute is going

to have to be as much fun as going to a really good disco. The lights have to be as beautiful as the Hippodrome or Heaven — not necessarily as elaborate or expensive, because you can do as much with one bulb as a hundred. The music and costumes have to be as wonderful as in clubs' muses Bartlett. 'The Queen of the Night is an aggressive fantasy figure and she's got to be as good as Tina Turner otherwise who's kidding who? I'd prefer to be watching Mad Max.'

Bartlett's last show he directed at the ICA was Theatre de Complicité's *More Bigger Snacks Now*, whose wiggly humour won them the Perrier prize (a years supply of designer water?) and he worked with Robin Whitmore, who is doing the decor and costumes for *The Magic Flute*, on *Pornography* last year. Whitmore has assembled the set from old doors and windows found in skips, there's a clothing factory next to The Firehouse in Kentish Town where they rehearsed, and they throw out material 'it's going to be black, gold and red. Lots of rubbish stuck together with some glitter on top' says Whitmore. The

opera starts at sunset and ends at sunrise, so the action takes place at night, and the lighting is crucial for the magical effect they are after. Lots of ultra-violet light — the sort that show up people's dandruff in discos.

'I haven't got time to be tasteful anymore' says Bartlett, who is becoming more quotable now that his sausages have finally arrived. Why does he think that opera has become so fashionable in the last couple of years? 'People are more into intense pleasure. The darker it gets the brighter you want the lights to be'. He also thinks its just the wheels of commercial exploitation that throw up genres, salsa last year, tango next, country and western the year after. But the attraction of the classical is also connected with the joys of form. It's opposed to the individualistic, romantic, school of theatre that went with the Me Decade and whose implicit assumption was that individual neuroses are the most important thing in the world, and too often made you think about the good points of the British tradition of stiff upper lip, cold showers, pull your socks up, and snap out of it.



camps it up with the *Magic Flute* crowd:

TO BE

TASTEFUL



'People are afraid of glamour. We're not. We have tended to turn our backs on the vulgarity of being professional, drawing on the energy of very basic ideas of wanting to watch someone on stage who is incredibly sexy, or someone who can really sing — the mainstays of popular entertainment from pop videos to strippers.' The fruit machine clicks behind us, and there's that satisfying (for some) chunky sound of money being paid out, as Bartlett pauses 'But we're not saying throw out the progress that's been made and say the women have to take their clothes off, and the men are butch and there has to be a happy end. But it's worth trying to be really beautiful'.

This is admirable if only because the puritanism of the Left and the 'alternative' has meant that in the last few years the Right has seemed sexier 'The Right use metaphors of sexual gratification the whole time' agrees Bartlett 'they say what you want is maximum pleasure as long as you get it and no-one else does. The show is erotic but not pornographic — pornography is a business, an industry,

but eroticism is about those deep, warm, personal tender feelings.' I feel a song coming on. But is it Camp? 'The only sensible thing said about Camp was by Isherwood who said it was making fun of things you take seriously', asserts Bartlett. He says he's been a prostitute, but you can't compare it to getting into a compromising position with the Arts Council. 'This show is more populist. My mother will come and see it. But we're not setting up in opposition to other groups who are working in places like the ICA. I love some shows with boring bits in, I've done some myself.'

All the people sitting round the table — Bartlett, Robin Whitmore, Leah Hausman (responsible for the *Mise-en-scene* 'it sounds better in French') and Nicholas Bloomfield, who is musical director and has left parts of the opera in German 'partly for musical reasons, partly because some of the characters are from a different world' all say they believe in True Love. On the other hand, they say working on the *Magic Flute* hasn't improved their sex lives, but anyhow, as the Italian proverb has it, 'Bed is the poor man's Opera'.

One of the reasons the show will be worth seeing is that the cast is such a hybrid crew from cabaret artists to professional opera singers; the company's credits ranging from *Sweeney Todd*, to Kent Opera, Philip Glass's *Satyagrauha*, Mitzi Wildebeest to *La Traviata*. 'People are going to get their money's worth' promises Bartlett 'we're giving them the works. It may be cold outside but here in the theatre people are falling in love, finding each other, losing each other. We want to go the whole way. There's sex and death, but it's not a video-nasty. It's accessible as a pantomime, but you have to come clean and say it's a profound work of art. I wake up in the middle of the night singing the *Magic Flute*.' Does he want to be famous? 'I don't want to be Michael Jackson, but I wouldn't mind being Paul Rutherford.' Is there a happy end? 'There's nothing wrong with a happy end, but the *Magic Flute* just doesn't have one.' It should be a great night out for all the family. ●

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PERFORMANCE

Elusive art megastar Robert Wilson was recently to be found in the unusually relaxed setting of the Dublin festival, performing and speaking at a conference of fellow artists. On a side trip from the epic scale extravaganzas of his recent *the CIVIL warS* and the revival of *Einstein on the Beach*, he talked frankly to ROB LA FRENAIS on art, politics and money, and revealed some fascinating glimpses of his early life:

THE CIVIL WARRIOR

Rob La Frenais: Did you come here specifically because it was Ireland?

Robert Wilson: Yes, I was curious to be here, to come here. (Wilson had been speaking at the conference *The Creative Impulse in Theatre*.)

RL: When you were raising money for *CIVIL warS*, how did you find the direct contact with people who had a lot of money passing through their hands? The Gettys and so on.

RW: Well, what happened was that, just as in my past work, like *Einstein on the Beach*, it sounds like a lot of money and it is a lot of money. But those are real costs, that is what it costs to make an opera. I mean no-one made any money out of it . . . one was paid . . .

RL: I wasn't so much going into the finance of it, I was more interested in how you found the personalities of the people from whom you had to raise that amount of money.

RW: The personalities are varied. Money's come from . . . governments, private individuals, through artists, through corporations, through public foundations, through private foundations . . .

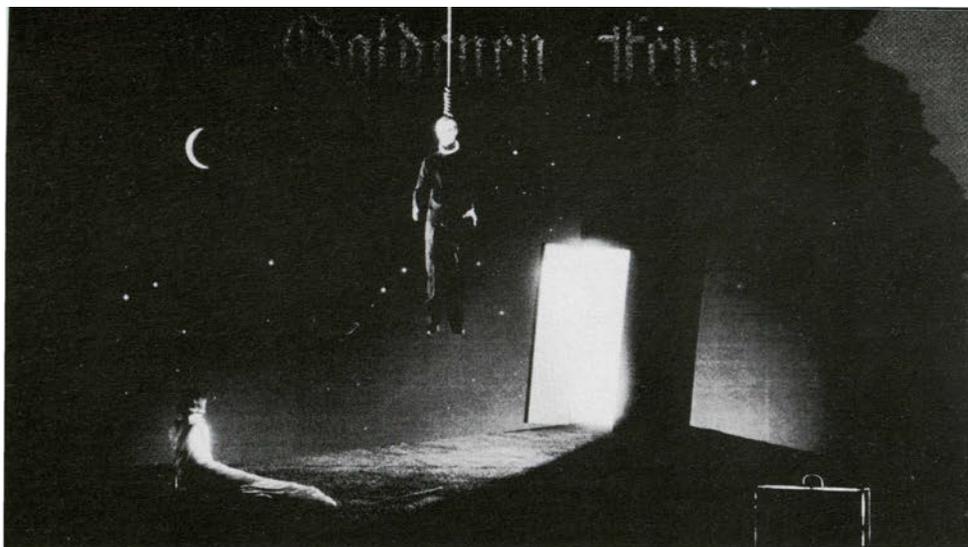
RL: Did you find you were having to stand up and shake hands with multi-millionaires and explain to them what your art was about?

RW: Right, yes, one has to do that also. It's not easy, it's difficult.

RL: Did you feel they were being educated by this process? Were they learning about real experimental work rather than the symphony orchestras? ►

Courtesy Walter Art Centre, Minneapolis





Wilson's recent *Golden Windows* (left) and his earlier *A Letter For Queen Victoria* (right)

Photo: Odu Sternberg

RW: Yeah, I think that's one way we come together. It's one part of the total picture. *CIVIL warS*, we had money given by Japanese schoolchildren, it was amazing. They would send a dollar or whatever to make the Japanese part of *CIVIL warS*. And money was given by Madame Hanai Mori. It came from all sources.

RL: And were the big givers satisfied?

RW: There were not that many big givers. There were a lot of small givers.

RL: I mean a lot of people would see you as a spearhead for actually raising money for the avant garde, just as one maybe sees Christo as a spearhead for major public works, and raising money for them. These sort of activities give some hope to the people struggling below, that public awareness is being raised, and their own projects might eventually get funds.

RW: We need to support the art of our time when we don't have it. Andre Malraux said, just after the war that a healthy attitude to the arts should be in the following areas; that is that we should maintain a balance of interest in protecting the art of our nation, all nations protecting the art of the past, and supporting the art of our time. And all too often we don't have such a healthy attitude, be it the government or the private individual, and it's very difficult to support a creation because no-one knows what it is. So, in *CIVIL warS* I wasn't so successful, actually, with the big money givers, being the corporations, the Gettys, whatever, because, for the most part they don't have a tradition of supporting new work, creations. If I say, OK I want to do *King Lear*, that's different, because they say, Oh well, that's Shakespeare, we know that that is, or I want to direct *Aida*, well we know what *Aida* is, but if I say I want support for *CIVIL*

warS RCA say, well I have to see it first, before I can give you the money, we can't support something unless we know what it is, so there's a lot of that attitude, and I think that we have to support it, new work, and take the risk. I think that we've made some progress.

RL: What did you think of Stefan Brecht's book?

RW: Oh, I've never read it. (laughter)

RL: Never read it! A lot of people have never read it.

RW: It's so complicated. I tried to read it once and I couldn't understand what he was saying . . .

RL: He makes some quite wild statements in it, for instance he says there's always a murder in your works. And I thought, well is there? Then of course I came to the *Readings* last night, and what was there? A murder at the very start. What do you make of it?

RW: I think he's a wise man. A bit too intellectual for me. The right side of the brain, the left side of the brain, maybe. I think artists don't necessarily understand what they're doing. I think critics don't understand what it is we're doing, and it's not the responsibility of an artist what it is that he does. But philosophers, in time, can say what it is. And Stefan's a philosopher. And I'm an artist, so . . . I don't really understand what it is that I'm doing.

RL: What is that relationship. It's another role, isn't it. That was the problem of the question (asked in the conference) about parasitism. I'm a journalist, and I think journalists are parasites too. I'm not interested in accusing an artist of being a parasite. We're all parasites to an extent. But the conclusion was interesting, in that you mentioned the letter from Christopher Knowles, which implied that he's become 'cured' but you hadn't set out to cure him.

RW: No. There was something sad about that. It was more interesting to me when he would write had-aphad-ap-had. He wrote and said, Dear Bob, how are you, and our record player's going well, and . . .

RL: But of course he's now more advantaged within society, so he had presumably gained something from the experience.

RW: I think so.

RL: Do you think it's an adequate exchange? You've gained artistic achievement, and to an extent fame and fortune.

RW: Yes.

RL: And he's gained normalcy. How do you feel about that exchange?

RW: I feel guilty. His mother's very pleased because his fingernails are clean. But it didn't bother me whether his fingernails were dirty or not.

RL: I suppose the fact that you weren't trying to cure him says a lot about the nature of curing itself.

RW: I think so. He was resisting the people in the institution, because they were constantly saying no to him. And once we said it's OK, then the situation changed. We just simply supported what he was doing, imitated him.

RL: When you had the letter from him, how did it indicate to you that he'd become normal?

RW: Date at the top, spelled everything more or less correctly, correct grammar. He used to do all these other, curious things, with language and the arranging of words.

RL: Can I draw you a bit on politics. What do you think of where Reagan's taking the world?

RW: I think it's terrifying. We're such a decadent society, the end, I guess it's understandable.

RL: So you think we're getting what's coming to us?

RW: I think so. It happened to the Persians, it happened to the Greeks, it happened to the Romans, it's happening to the Americans, happened to the Germans . . . It's the end.

RL: So drop the bomb now?

RW: I think that not until we drop the bomb in America will we know where our boundaries are. We're such a vast country, we've never been invaded. We don't know what's it like. Not

until someone drops the bomb will we know where our boundaries are.

RL: You're sitting here in the future battlefield. Europe.

RW: Yes. Europe is becoming this battlefield.

RL: The ancient marching ground.

RW: Exactly.

RL: But are you saying that to join the Nuclear Free movement is irrelevant?

RW: No, but . . . it's not irrelevant but . . . it's very frightening. To see what's there, there's a big dragon, and feel powerless. It's not that one shouldn't act but . . .

RL: Artists have some power.

RW: They do, but it seems almost inevitable, the destruction. Do you feel the same?

RL: I feel that I would like to be recorded as having tried to do something about it, which is why I'm a member of CND. As a person concerned with art, I agree with you. We are very likely to be witnessing the downfall of this particular civilisation. On one hand I feel that. But as an ordinary living, breathing person, I feel that it's vital to be known to be doing something about it.

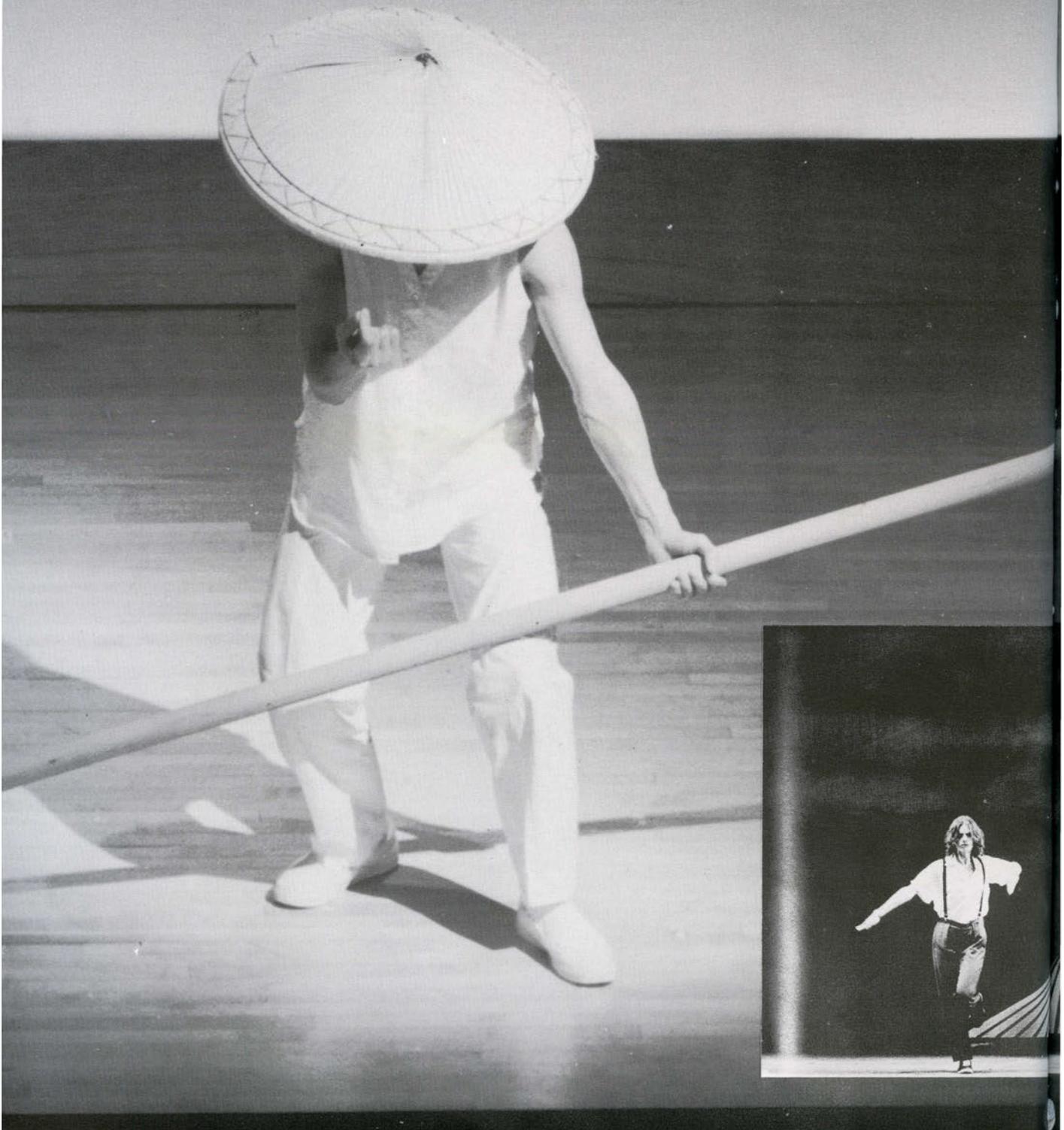
RW: I think so too. Not to be doing something about it is neglecting an intellectual responsibility, an artistic responsibility.

RL: And I think there is this great split, which is a problem for all of us, a split between our human responsibility and our artistic responsibility, which needs to be closed up.

RW: I think that it happens with festival structures like this, ▶



THE CIVIL WARRIOR



international conferences. I was just in a conference in Greece, and a lot of the people said at the end, not really very much was accomplished, but what I think is fantastic is that we all came together. There was someone from Korea, someone from Africa, Brazil, Mexico, that was what was most important.

RL: In the performance yesterday is that you were working in a less than perfect atmosphere. That was quite fascinating to me because I was used to your work being presented in a very well prepared way, well presented, and to see the imperfection is interesting. Do you think that there is room for risk in large scale work?

RW: Yes, I do. I've done a play that was seven days long, continuous. I did another that was twenty four hours, continuous. That's very different than if I do a work, say *Einstein on the Beach*, where everything is very carefully rehearsed, planned, repeated. When you're doing a play that's seven days long, you make other decisions, work in another way. And that's exciting too. Works that are thirty seconds long. You make different decisions with work that is 30 seconds and work that is seven days long.

RL: But if you have a multi-million dollar operation on your hands, do you lose that sense of the fact that in *real* time anything

can happen in a performance. When you've got so much money invested, can you afford for things to go wrong?

RW: Things always go wrong!

RL: Things always go wrong. But for the unique moment, for the real time moment, where there's a real sense of danger, which I think every performance must have, what about that?

RW: I think every performance must have a sense of danger too. Whether it cost a million dollars or one dollar, I don't think it makes any difference. However much money's put into it. I work all the time. Twenty hours a day. I've got just one blue suit, I have to take out my ink pen and cover up . . . I was on the airplane, you could see the white lining, someone kept complaining about it. Money's evil. It's curious, money, I mean. If you think too much about it . . . it can make over very neurotic.

Most rich people are very neurotic, because of money. I just try not to think about it too much. I still live in a very small apartment in New York, and quite modestly. All of my resources money go into my work. Into the creation of the work. So when I'm paid a fee for something, or I sell a drawing, that goes to support the creation of a new work. It's like an investment into the future, the next work. I don't care about having possessions. I'm more interested in the creation of work.

RL: You don't think you'll get to the stage where you'll insist on being driven around in limos all the time. Or perhaps you already are.

RW: Oh, that sounds good. I think to be driven around in a limo would be good. That, and to have a telephone (laughter). But the other things I can forget about. To have a bar in the limo, and to carry around a telephone, that would be . . . I wouldn't even need an apartment. I could live in the limo.

RL: What do you think drives you? Why the twenty hour day?

RW: I've always been that way. I remember when I was about seven years old, I heard my mother say to someone on the telephone, 'Oh Bob's got a *project*'.

RL: Were you a normal all-

American kid?

RW: I was a loner. I'd like to come home from school and go to my room and lock the door and stay in the room by myself. I didn't have school friends. I didn't socialise a lot. I wasn't really particularly interested in anything. I didn't know what I would do. Later, I got more interested in art. I wanted to be a painter. I didn't particularly have any talents, or skills. I wasn't a good student. Just an average student. In fact in college I graduated last in my class, I was the worst one. I was the least likely to succeed.

RL: Your background seems to affect your attitude to your being a 'whole' person with all your faculties, working with people whose faculties have shifted . . .

RW: Oh wow . . . (laughter). Terrifying.

RL: Sure, sure. But how do you think your childhood as a loner affected the discovery that you were so-called normal, or maybe you didn't think you were so-called normal?

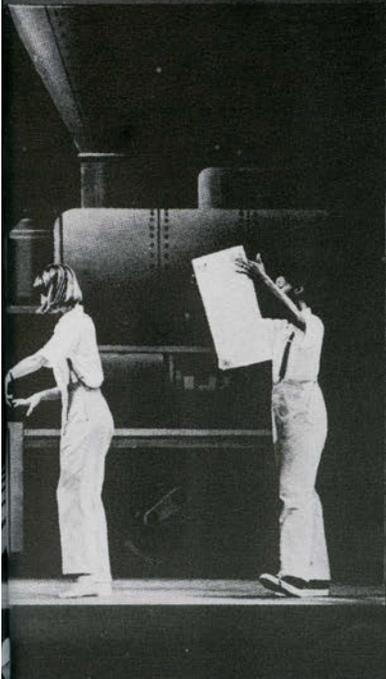
RW: Do you know what my father said to me when he saw my first play? He said, 'Son, not only is it sick, it's abnormal.' (laughter) I never thought I was *normal*, but . . . I was *trying* to be normal. I was in a mental institution for six weeks and I was trying to get out. I put myself in and I was trying to get out. That's when I learnt a lot about theatre.

RL: You'd gone in voluntarily.

RW: Yes, I was trying to get out. But I was actually just — it was a complicated time — also very curious about what it would be like to be inside. I'd worked in an institution once — I was an attendant, I took food from the kitchen and gave it to the patients when I was going to school. But then to be a patient . . . I had never taken drugs, and they gave me all these drugs, and I was like a zombie, I was so spaced out, and they kept wanting me to act normal. And I thought, if I could stop these drugs, then I could be normal, but I can't, as long as you give me these damn *drugs*! I hated it. And they kept giving me the drugs, so then I had to learn to sort of *pretend* to be normal, so maybe that's why . . . I went into the theatre. ●

The Knee Plays

Courtesy Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis



Einstein on the Beach

ARTOCRACY

LIVE ART NOW



SILVIA ZIRANEK on art society, survival and articulation:

BORN TO SHOP

ARITITIS
 ARTISM
 ARTATED
 ARTISH. VERY ISH
 ARTLY, ARTLY
 ARTER/ARTLER/ARTSTER/
 ARTIRIST/ARTEE
 ARTIBLE
 ARTESE
 ARTEE (OH HOW WE . . .)
 ARTNIK
 ARTATA
 ARTINGS (USU. PLU)
 ART(L)ETTE
 ART(R)ESS
 ARTISSIMO & ARTICATO
 ARTOVIA
 ARTSCH
 ARTOPOEIA
 ARTOPATH
 ARTICIDE
 ARTIATRIST
 ARTURBIA
 ARTEURISE
 ARTRAGE
 ARTARONIE
 ARTICIANSHIP
 ARTROPOLIS
 ARTYRDOM
 ARTOLESCENCE
 ARTOGAMY
 ARTISEPTIC
 ARTICULTURE
 ARTONOMY
 ARTOCRACY
 AND
 ARTOCOL
 THE WIDTH THE WIND THE WOMB
 OF WORDS
 THE HOPE OF SCOPE
 TASTE OBSCURES CHOICE
 THERE BUT FOR THE WASTE OF
 OUGHT GO I
 THERE IS NOTHING QUITE LIKE A
 SOCIAL CONSCIENCE WITH A PATIO
 I WAS TOO YOUNG TO REFUSE
 WHEN I WAS FIRST DRAGGED TO
 AN ART MAUSOLEUM
 ART IS, OF COURSE, A GREAT
 SOCIAL ASSET AND AS SUCH NOT
 ALWAYS QUITE PLAUSIBLE. BUT
 THE THING TO DO IS TO LOOK

CLEAN ABOUT IT . . .
 HOW ART DIFFERS FROM
 DETERGENT (WHERE WAS I WHEN
 THE WORLD CHOSE GENIUS)
 ART IS NOT FUNNY EVERYDAY.
 ART IS NOT LIFE EVERDAY.
 EVERYDAY ONE FINDS ART IN ALL
 SORTS OF PLACES
 ARE REPRODUCTIONS YOUR LOT
 IN LIFE?
 WOULD YOU SAY WATTEAU
 MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE?
 AM I REALLY AN HEROIC
 REFERENCE IN NEW BRITISH ART
 IS ART JUST MORE ART
 MY ART IS NOT MY FORTRESS
 SHOULD I LOOK SCULPTURAL, OR
 FINANCIAL?
 YOU CAN'T ALWAYS TELL WHERE
 I'VE BEEN BY HOW I LOOK
 (WHERE DO WE COME FROM,
 WHERE ARE WE GOING, AND WHAT
 AM I GOING TO WEAR WHEN I GET
 THERE)
 INFORMATIVE EXCLUSION
 INDICATES CAUTIOUS
 INTELLIGENCE; I SAY HELLO . . .
 AND YOU SMILE
 AND IN BETWEEN THERE IS AIR.
 AND A LITTLE ART. HERE AND
 THERE. HUNG UP TO DRY. IS IT
 CREASE RESISTANT? ART . . . AND
 THAT SORT OF THING
 WELL HERE WE ARE, IN THE
 WORLD OF ART. GET THE PICTURE?
 THERE'S A HECK OF A LOT OF
 USED ART TOO
 ART. AND OTHER EMOTIONS . . .
 IT'S NOT JUST ANY OLD EITHER.
 AND HOW WILL THE PEOPLE
 DISCUSS ART WITH PERFECT
 STRANGERS
 EXPERIENCE HAS LEFT ME IN
 TRANSIT (A PLANE, PROBABLY,)
 MAKING LISTS
 THAT'S WHY I WEAR WHAT I DO.
 BECAUSE I'M THAT SORT OF
 PERSON
 WE'RE TALKING ABOUT
 ACTUALLY, QUESTIONING
 ALREADY, FILLED WITH TOO MUCH
 AT ALL
 AT THE WINDOW OF THROUGH
 ALWAYS BEGINNING, A SERIES

OF WHILE, WHILE. AS FLIPPANT AS
 FREEDOM A FEELING TO LOCK
 AWAY IN THE WHETHER
 INDEFINITELY LONG
 APPEAR TRANSFIXED HOWEVER
 DISDAINFUL. (SOME PEOPLE CALL
 ME ARROGANT. SOMETIMES,
 THERE'S NOTHING . . . ELSE . . . TO
 DO)
 I WISH TO WEAR MY DIARY TO
 THE BALL.
 ISN'T ART OF OUR AGE ALWAYS
 NOUVELLE
 PRODUCE YOUR VERY OWN
 VERSIONS OF VARIATIONS
 OH BONJOUR, DARLING
 BIENVENUE TO OCCASIONALLY
 TALKING TO EYES RATHER THAN
 CONVENIENCE, SUSPENDED IN
 SUFFICIENCY, TRANSFERRED TO
 AMBITION, LOOK EVEN BETTER
 WHEN I'M MAKING MONEY AT IT
 IT IS POSSIBLE TO PROTECT A
 WISH FROM A CONSTRUCTIVE
 NEED
 ATTEMPTED SCRUPLES/
 EMBARRASSED FINANCE DEFENDS
 ART, AND WE . . . BOIL CARROTS
 THERE CAN NEVER BE AS MANY
 WOMEN AS CARROTS
 WHEN HAS ENOUGH PROVED TO
 BE AN INFLUENCE?
 IF (L)IFE IS TOO MUCH, BE GLAD
 THAT YOU HAVEN'T ENOUGH
 ART IS NOT JUST AN ARMCHAIR
 POSSIBILITY (TAKE COMPLACENCY
 FOR A LONG WALK)
 EVIDENCE OVERCOMES
 INFORMATION, REGARDLESS OF
 WORDS.
 WORDS WORDS WORDS.
 ALWAYS WORDS.
 JUST WORDS?
 WORDS ARE SO SUITABLE FOR
 EVERYDAY USE. SO IS ART. (OH
 GOODIE, JUST ART AND US. YUM
 YUM YUM. SOMETIMES I'D LIKE TO
 EAT ART.) ART IS GENERALLY
 CONSIDERED TO BE AUTHENTIC, TO
 BE AN EXPERIENCE. IT'S LARGE
 ENOUGH TO BE TRUE. SOME LIKE
 THEIR OWN ART (HOW
 CONVENIENT TO BE SO HONEST.
 BUT IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE TO
 PROTECT DESIRE FROM LOGIC . . .)
 IN PLACE OF ART I WISH TO SAY
 'WHERE'
 (IF I DO THIS RIGHT, I GET A
 PRIZE)
 (BRACKETS HAVE A LOT TO DO
 WITH IT)
 FACTS ARE INSUFFICIENT TO
 SUBSTANTIATE OUR EXPERIENCES
 AND EXISTENCE (IN AUSTRALIA?)
 AND BUT HOW BORING AND
 UGLY DOES ONE HAVE TO BE TO
 BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY???
 WORDS ARE MUCH LIKE SOAP,
 AND MUSHROOMS
 I LIKE TO SMILE AND THINK
 YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED ME
 (TALKING) ALREADY
 I SUPPOSE THE REASON I'M HERE
 IS BECAUSE I DO ART. VERY ISH.
 IT'S JUST ART

Cont p. 47

JOHN ASHFORD springs to defend the dancers:

**La la la's *Human Sex*:
Risky and spectacular**

Photo: Edourd Lock

MARCH OF THE MODERNS

'Bang, bang;

Bang, bang; Ouch!' The pages of the last issue of Performance magazine echo to the sound of Rob La Frenais hitting the nail right on the head. From Edinburgh, he reports 'an atmosphere of a monetarist mini-bonanza, where predictably tired comedy acts, the lowest common denominator, form the bulk of the Festival'. Absolutely right, I'm sure; although my own view is born only of prejudice since the stench of the 'all pervasive vaudeville tat' wafting down to London has kept me away for certainly half of Rob's ten years.

I do wish La Frenais would write more often about areas other than live art. For it is when he ventures outside his field of specialisation that he is at his most entertaining and iconoclastic. Last year, he sat in ▶



Pina Bausch — a case of parallel but separate development

judgement on 'visual theatre' — specifically a generation of work show at the ICA — and found if guilty of . . . well, of *what* I can't quite recall now; but Bang, Bang in went the nails with seeming accuracy at the time, even if it was the wrong bit of wood. I came out in a nasty case of sympathetic stigmata, and was thus provoked to press bloody hand to typewriter in a defence that pleaded mitigating circumstances.

And now he's done it again. For later in the Edinburgh article he turns his attention to dance. Mere mention of the form has Frenais the Frenetic banging on like some latter-day St Bernard of the avant-garde:

'I'm a bit prejudiced against dance, especially *dance* [1] on the grounds that it never seems to deliver what it promises — visual strength, glamour and excitement [2]. However 'postmodern' or whatever it claims to be, [3], it all seems to be down to lithe forms posturing in leotards [4], rather like animated but flaccid Henry Moore sculptures [5]. When someone like Pina Bausch or Lucinda Childs comes along to teach them a lesson [6], dancers and choreographers in this country at least [7], insist on watering any new ideas down and down until everything is finally stripped-pine leotard-safe [8].'

Well, here I am at the typewriter again to offer eight footnotes in defence of dance.

[1] Dance, especially dance

Just as my prejudice against Edinburgh is founded in ignorance, so I think must be La Frenais' admitted prejudice against dance. What could he have been watching in the last ten years? In 1975, I might well have agreed with him, and with reason. But in the 80's, as choreography has become an increasingly important element of cross-discipline collaboration, and dance itself has come closer and closer to performance, it's now incomprehensible to dismiss the form in these terms.

A year ago, I felt I could no longer go around saying I liked dance but I didn't know anything about it; and so I consciously embarked on a self-devised course of study. My way in was inevitably through the theatrical

— not the naff narratives of the major modern companies, but rather performance-related work like that of Katy Duck's Group O, first seen in London during last year's Dance Umbrella festival. I saw as much as I possibly could. A couple of fortunate invitations fell into place: first, the opportunity to work with Micha Bergese's company Mantis for a few weeks; and second, to attend the Festival of New Dance in Montreal. By the time I got to Montreal in September, I'd seen most of the major performances on offer there. But the unique possibility of watching the work of Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown, together with *La La La*, Rosas, Second Stride and a selection of innovative Canadian companies in the space of ten days, confirmed that my period of study had not been in vain.

Whereas in London a couple of years earlier I had watched Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset* with admiration, now in Montreal at the end of the same performance I was on my feet with the rest of them, for the first time ever calling 'Encore' in a theatre — and this because I genuinely wanted to see the whole thing again, immediately. '*Set and Reset*' is a masterpiece not simply because of the success of the collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg and Lauri Anderson, but because in it Trisha Brown, the choreographer's choreographer, has mastered her form. Every single action of the dancers on stage, seen as a group, is an organic development of that which has come before — not merely a series of logical consequences, but rather a manifestation, limped in its clarity, of all those expectation-confounding twists, those inter-related turns, and those complex reversals of both living things and of life itself. I hadn't been able to see that before.

[2] Visual strength, glamour and excitement

Well, as attentive readers of *City Limits* will know, 'Trains don't arrive if you wait at bus stops'. If all I'd wanted was spectacle, then I might as well have become a Torvill and

Dean groupie for a year. Listen to Edouard Lock, whose work with *La La La Human Steps* certainly displays 'visual strength, glamour and excitement':

'I think I'm reacting against the simplistic perception that society gives of the human body. Nearly all tasks are now automated. We no longer need to be aware of our bodies. The body has become objectified — a sexual object to be observed, a fragile object to be conserved — but not an object which is both utilitarian and functional. For me, dance serves to make more complex the image that people have of the body.

'I'm put in mind of conversations I used to have with friends some years ago when we were discussing what it means to be human within the animal kingdom. They argued that the human body makes us an inferior being; it is only by the intellect, the spirit that we are elevated. I didn't agree, but I couldn't find arguments against that view at the time. We are the decathlon athletes of the animal kingdom. We are not specialists, not champions of running or jumping; but the range and complexity of our gestures far surpasses the potential of any other animal on earth, and I think that is directly related to the development of our intellect. The argument that the more our minds develop, the less physically able we become, is totally wrong. The refinement of mind and body goes hand in hand. The greater the spiritual development, the more it is in need of a supple expressive too.'

In other words, dance, however seemingly abstract, is by its very nature metaphorical. The use of falls in the work of *La La La's Human Sex* appears to be both risky and spectacular. But there's more to it than circus thrills. The fall — the failure — is an inevitable consequence of the jump. But the expectation of failure is constantly subverted into something positive: the fall is harmless when it is practised, the fall can be broken by the arms or bodies of others, the accumulated energy of the fall can be converted into a different jump. The optimism is transparent and celebratory, and goes beyond spectacle to the heart of humanity.

[3] Postmodern or whatever it claims to be

Ah, there's that word again. There must be as many definitions of 'postmodern' as there are professors of semiology in Italy and post-structuralist philosophers in Paris. Personally, I subscribe to the view that most twentieth century art

movements may be described as 'modern', the result of the progressive thrust and desire for discovery of the avant-garde. Such movements all come to a necessary conclusion in minimalism: the white canvas, the glass cube building, the repeated three note theme, the last writing of Beckett. The postmodern consciousness distrusts the idea of 'progress' since it is that which has created a world where one third of the people are allowed to starve whilst the two other thirds, overburdened with armaments, daily threaten the extinction of the planet. And after all, everything has now been said, everything has been done before.

The only new thing which can be created is the result of the playful and self-conscious re-arrangement of current and historically referential elements. That's postmodern.

The trouble is, neither this nor any other definition of 'postmodern' will stick across the board. Each form decided independently that it was 'postmodern' when its own most recent modern movement was running out of steam. Since there's a hint of 'more postmodern than thou' in Rob La Frenais' comment, it should be said that according to dance historian extraordinaire Sally Banes, the word 'postmodern' was first applied to dance by Michael Kirby in discussing the work of Judson Dance Theater in New York way back in 1972. I have no reason to disbelieve her, and most certainly don't recall the instance since I was only just emerging from a preoccupation with loon pants and the Pink Floyd. Unfortunately, Kirby was using the term to describe the work of people whose concerns were most closely related to those of minimalism. It wasn't until the 80's, with pieces like that of Karole Armitage's *Drastic Classicism* where ballet technique, social dance and popular culture are pillaged in the construction of the work, that dance begins to exhibit the characteristics more generally known as postmodern.

And now, to confuse matters still further, an effort is being made to distinguish that dance which is genuinely postmodern from the minimalism which preceded it and which was, with hindsight, erroneously called 'postmodern'. The new dance is simply called 'New Dance'. But the simplicity of the label should not disguise the fact that much of it shares preoccupations with other postmodern forms, and should be examined alongside them.

I have a suspicion that this label-making is of consequence only to critics and academics, and matters not a jot to either dancers or their audiences.

[4] Lithe forms posturing in leotards

A casual glance at the publicity of the major modern companies might suggest that the tyranny of the leotard reigns supreme. The problem here is that the garment throws up associations with the 'dance boom', when dubious Green Goddesses converted draughty church halls into fitness centres and sold their wares under the unlikely banner of 'art'. Thankfully all that is now on the wane as the démodé aerobics class gives way to the high-tec allure of glistening new Nautilus gym equipment. The casualty is the costume of leotard and tights, in itself a perfectly practical solution to the problem of how to dress dance. For certain choreography is simply about the body, what it looks like and what it can do. The body needs to be seen, rather than implied by the fall and line of clothing. In a sense, such work should be danced naked, but the constant display of genitals would not only offer an irrelevant distraction, but also confer its own misleading statement. Hence the emergence of the leotard — the nearest thing to the naked — which was OK in cotton, but a liability when it turned into Lycra. Lycra is a stretchy plastic which disguises biological beings (these fleshy and fragile things with veins, hair, sweat, distinguishable muscles, nipples, and

genitalia) as impossibly smooth and sexless automata. Unfortunately, it is a fabric favoured by Merce Cunningham, and I for one find it distressingly difficult to watch his masterful choreography through the shield of the Lycra Body Condom.

Independent dance, however, has almost foresaken the leotard. Out of some twenty performances I've seen so far in this year's Dance Umbrella, I can only once recall having seen leotards — and those heavily disguised by skirts on the women of Siobhan Davies, deceptively languid but rewardingly complex *Silent Partners* for Second Stride. Some of these Dance Umbrella performances, incidentally, are reported elsewhere in this magazine — which is a start. I'd say, though, that those of Sally Sykes, Rosemary Lee, Patricia Bardi, Lloyd Newson, Anna Furse, Kirstie Simson and Julyen Hamilton, Marie Chouinard, Daniel Larrieu, Group O, Katy Duck's for Extemporaneous, Anne Seagrave, Danielle Hogan, Cathy Jefferson, Yolanda Snaithe, and Laurie Booth and Harry de Wit are all directly relevant to the concerns of Performance magazine. And there's still three weeks to go.

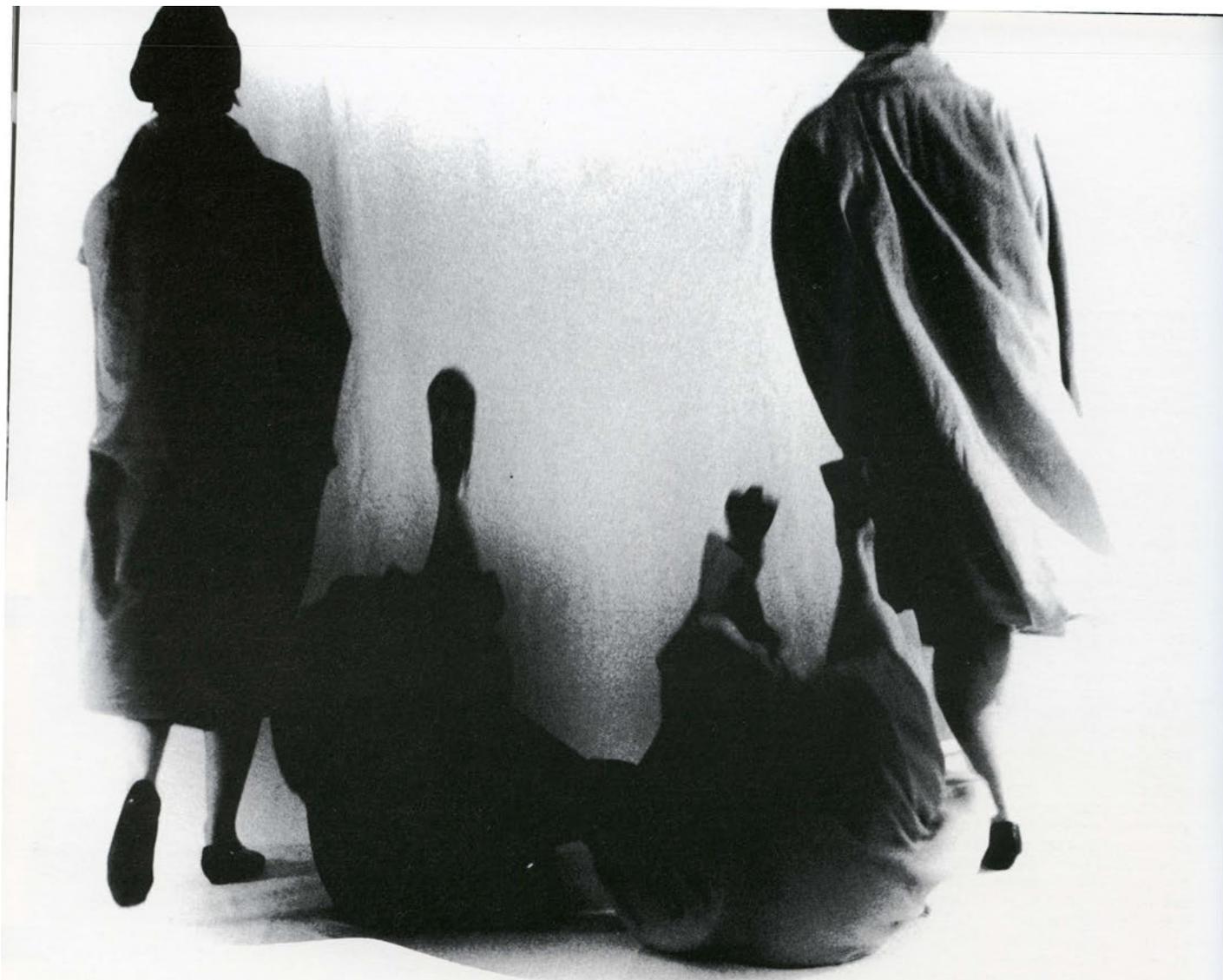
[5] Animated but flacid Henry Moore sculptures

Coming from a different discipline, it's useful to look at some dance as moving sculpture. But Henry Moore? ▶

Rosas Danst Rosas — ritualised exorcism

Photo: Jean-Luc Tanghe





No more leotards
(Stella by Jean-Pierre
Perrault)

Surely not. Robert Longo, perhaps — in the work of promising young Canadian Catherine Tardif. But she'd never heard of him.

[6] A lesson from Pina Bausch or Lucinda Childs

Until recently, all European new dance seemed to be heavily influenced by developments in New York. Now, especially in France and the Flemish countries, it is emerging with strong and individual accents. Even in Montreal, a mere eight hours, drive from the Big Loft, there is a distinct and coherent *Quebécois* style. The last thing it needs now is to take yet more lessons. And anyway, I refuse to believe that the work of — say — Ian Spink is derivative of Pina Bausch. It is, in the words of Michael Huxley, 'a case of parallel but separate development'. And that's the way it should be.

[7] In this country

Well, yes, I have to admit it. In my year of dance, the work I have most enjoyed has not been based in Britain — with the exception of Laurie Booth and *Second Stride*. Trisha Brown is in New York; La La La Human Steps is in Montreal; *Rosas* is in Brussels; Mark Tompkins

is in Paris — and I'm sure there's much more to be enjoyed in France and Holland that I've not been able to see. Some of these performances have been to Britain, of course, and others might wash up on our little island. With luck, Anne-Teresa de Keersmaeker's brilliant *Rosas Danst Rosas* will be seen in London in February. It is two hours of four black-clad women's systematised sleeping, sitting, walking, and finally dancing until they drop, a choreography of rigorously disciplined complexity to the brutal algebra of Thierry de Mey's amplified music. This is a performance which transcends form: a ritualised exorcism of everyday anxiety which leaves its performers transfigured and its audience astonished at what has taken place. It owes nothing to Pina Bausch, Lucinda Childs, Henry Moore or stripped pine, and the women do not wear leotards.

[8] Stripped-pine leotard-safe

Rosas Danst Rosas is dangerous. So are Laurie Booth and Harry de Wit. As I was watching Laurie spin a hospital bed at the Almeida, apparently regardless of the safety of microphones or audience, I was put in mind of Mark Long with *The People Show* smashing up wood in

the old Open Space basement fifteen years ago. The form may be utterly different, but I am convinced that there is a thread of steel which binds these performances across time and across disciplines. It is, in the end, about the performance, not the vehicle which drives it.

Finally, I should say that the footnotes above are nothing more than end of term scribbles by a first year student. To my shame, I've read nothing about dance; I've only looked and listened. And as for Rob La Frenais' liking of *our caca phoney H. our caca phoney H*, I can make no comment since this was one of the few British dance events I failed to see this year. I'd known Michael Clark's work both before and during the period he was grotesquely and damagingly hyped, and I didn't need to be told by him that *Hair* was a load of camp tat — I was there at its London premiere. And gosh, dear me, maybe I'm turning into a dance critic, for I too am tiring of his juvenile japes when he is, as they say, such 'a lovely dancer'. But liking it is a start, Rob; now why not get stuck in to the demanding stuff. And don't be put off by the fact that it's skilled.

Footnote: Thanks to Tim Albery for making more sense of my translation of Edouard Lock's French as reported by Aline Gélinas in the Montreal dance magazine *Ré-flex*. ●

Photo: Ormsby K Ford

KEN GILL slams British product:

In Germany, The European Media Art Network (EMAN), an 8 country simultaneous Video screening, took place in familiarly chic surroundings at NGBK here in Berlin.

The wit, acuteness and diversity of work from Belgium made theirs the most palatable programme by a long chalk. The German stuff was, well . . . Teutonic: very competently executed, a bit weird in places, but lacking any genuine 'madness'.

The prospect of seeing what new developments had taken place in British video over the last year encouraged me to sit out 50 minutes of the most turgid vids Holland could offer.

To my dismay, the British LVA programme that followed it was no better. It certainly didn't reflect 'current practices' as most of the programme was over a year old. A subdued depression turned to embarrassment as baffled Germans consulted their programme notes to check they weren't really watching children's TV; I refer to the inexplicable inclusion of *Circumstantial Evidence*, in what I assumed was supposed to be a video art programme. The highlights of fleeting brilliance in Grahame Young's tapes were somewhat overshadowed by the very tired, very laboured, and really let's be honest, very boring other tapes.

It's not that the tapes were 'bad' in any conventional sense, it is just that they were so damn conventional.

There is a very strong sense of *deja-vu* I get whenever I see tapes like Mark Wilcox's *Calling The Shots* or any Cate Elwes piece. It's all to do with this extremely tedious technique of 'post-structuralist' video making, which makes any tape look like art college work. This clever-clever style has been around in independent film and video for a decade to my knowledge, and to serve up half a video art programme comprised of this formula based product, like instant mashed potato, shows either an alarming lack of imagination on the half of the tape producers, or plain laziness on that of the selectors.

It gives Europeans the distorted idea that in fact nothing new is happening in British creative video: that it is still obsessed with a vague and cosy tradition of video art in the UK, stretching back in a tenuous line to David Hall.

To me this predictability is indicative of a kind of *Arte-Povera* nurtured by British video artists and their supporting institutions of LVA, ACGB, etc. A structure coming apart through lack of initiative, lack of organisation, inertia and a great timidity.

It is extremely demoralising, but

not all the problems can be blamed on a lack of money. The fostering, by ACGB and LVA, of a flaccid and marginal video art as produced by many established British video artists, does nothing but take an exciting and potent medium (ie: video) down a cul-de-sac to impotence.

Everyone knows that 'video is the mass medium of the late 20th Century, etc' (yawn). But, as far as I can see, the small number of (so called) video artists that represent Britain internationally have not been told. The majority seem content to continue pottering about with a porta-pak.

By contrast, a week later The Duvet Brothers were in Berlin doin'-their-thang in a tent on a piece of waste land. The night I saw their show, they were scratching on 20 monitors to an estimated audience of 8 (3 perched transitorially on bicycles).

Any comparisons between this and the LVA effort a week previously were halting.

It succinctly illustrated the degree to which the established video artists and their sponsors, have lost their way.

The Duvet's stuff had sparkle, poignancy and guts. Quite a recipe! Containing all those ingredients live mediums are supposed to have, you know? But then their whole approach is different. The way they grab post-production time for free, their originality in the way they handle political and aesthetic issues, and their overall intelligence: They know where they are going, and they have a good idea to whom they wish to address their work.

Something tells me that theirs is a much more healthy and realistic approach than many of those currently permeating the claustrophobic world of British video art.

There is patently a great lack of communication at *grass roots level* between Britain and the rest of Europe, but it is very important for British work to get out. If LVA aren't reflecting what is *really* happening on the ground in its international selections, then the individual producers must do it for themselves. It is more than unfortunate that the British contribution to the EMAN programme looked so bad. It is actually very damaging, because there is the danger Europeans may begin to wonder if anything exciting is going on in Britain at all.

The question British video makers have to ask themselves is whether LVA is doing its job properly. Needless to say, from 600 miles away, I get the feeling LVA couldn't care less. They seem too tied up in their internal problems, over-diversified and frankly too cliquey

DOES GOOD VIDEO ART EXIST IN BRITAIN, OR IS IT ALL TEDIOUS?

these days. As a paranoiac, I worry that they are becoming something of an obstacle which is stopping 'hot-product', which may not conform to the current selector's flavour of the month, from getting out into Europe, a liability rather than an asset, to video makers.

However, considering that there is a dearth of British video work in Europe generally, my message has to be:

If someone else can't do it for you, then do it yourself. The Channel isn't as wide as people would have you believe, and there are a number of well established organisations throughout Europe who should be encouraged to show more British work, and not just the sporadic packages which LVA knocks up. So, *please* lets see more of you, in Berlin especially. ●

Continued from page 42

OF COURSE I'M A COMMODITY (I LIKE MEN TOO: IT DOESN'T MEAN I'M A BAD PERSON)

RESPONSE? I CAN HARDLY WAIT . . . JUST BECAUSE I SAY WHAT I WANT DOESN'T MEAN THAT I NEED IT ANY MORE THAN YOU DO.

THERE'S NO REASON TO IGNORE REASON IF IT PROVES TO BE OF USE YOU MAYBE CAN'T ALWAYS DECIPHER BETWEEN PRECOCIOUS TALENT AND FACETIOUS HONESTY I TRY NOT TO BE EMBARRASSED (NEWS IS SO TEMPORARY)

FROM THE DAY I SAW ART (I'VE DONE THE TATE BUT NOT THE ROOF)

FROM THE DAY I SAID YES, I'VE SAID . . . © Ziranek 85 ●

CHRISTINE BINNIE writes:

1 2 3 4 5

LIVE ART NOW

A DA LIFE

Dihihi Di Dihihi Di Dihihi Di
Dihihi Di Dihihi
'Yes, hello?'
'Can I speak to Christine Binnie please?'
'Yes, speaking.'
'Oh, hellow my name's Simon Foxton.'
'Yes?'
'I would like to book you to do a performance.'
'Oh yes when would that be?'
'On Monday.'
'Sounds OK what did you have in mind?'
'Well, it's for a fashion show, we thought body-printing might be a good idea.'
'Thats funny.'
'Why?'
'Bodyprinting's my new hobby. It sounds like a gorgeous idea. How long do you want us to do it for?'
'We thought it could go on for the whole show. At the back, in the middle, just doing what you want.'
'Well it sounds like a lovely idea, but don't blame me if you don't sell any clothes. Are you sure you know what we're going to be like? We're not a very good sales gimmick you know!'
'We've already decided we want you so don't worry about anything else!'
'How much do we get paid, by the way?'
'£50 each, OK?'
'I think we'll make it into a feminist performance.'
'That's all right yes — do anything you want.'
'OK'
'See you on Monday, bye.'
'Bye.'

Shopping list

Brandy
Butter
Sugar
Bananas
Porridge oats
Food colouring
Black, purple and 'flesh'
bodypaint
Sellotape

MARY IN THE OF A

N E O- NATURIST

Things to take

One old bra each
Calor gases
Paint brushes and sponges
Frying pan with lid
Three saucepans

'Hello we're Christine and Jennifer Binnie, we should be on the list'

SOLDIER: Are you models?

US: Well, sort of.

SOLDIER: Who are you with?

US: Parachute

SOLDIER: Is this you, Binnie, Jennifer and Wilma?

US: Yes that's right.

SOLDIER: Where's WILMA then?

US: She'll be here soon. You'll know who she is, don't worry.

SOLDIER: OK, in you go I'll look out for Wilma.

We walk over to the tent and find Simon Foxtan and a girl with a bald head — everything is very fashion showish indeed. We give a rundown of our plan they say 'it's fine, but you can't have calor-gas on the stage.'

'Oh that's fine we don't mind', we say, and give in without a fight.

They direct us to the free Bloody Mary tent and we sip chicly while waiting for Wilma. Wilma arrives.

'That soldier seemed to know who I was.'

'Want a Bloody MARY?'

'Yes, not half.'

We each take an extra Bloody Mary and return back catwalk. Porridge is the first thing to be prepared, we cook it on the barrack lawn, over our portable calor-gases. Nico, our 7 year old member arrives. It's nearly time to start and Wilma quickly paints some sexy underwear on to Jen. The fashion models gawp and enjoy the display. We put our kit on the catwalk and take our positions sitting in the audience, with our ordinary clothes on.

The performance started with us clambering onto the catwalk, just after the show had started *à la* feminist protest beauty contest

style. It was like a dream come true being able to jump onto the catwalk with all those glamorous models and parade up and down with our ordinary clothes on — it's a gorgeous experience. We take our clothes off as we walk along, and then start painting. We get bored and get into the audience and pretend Wilma is an unawares audience member, we drag her on stage and make her join in. To start with we paint sexy underwear on and all swagger up and down the catwalk several times, then print on to the backdrop then sellotape Wilma's bra to the backdrop and write:

FLAMBÉ YOUR BRASSIERE.

Then paint fashions like the models onto our bodies. (The models seem to enjoy it).

Out comes the coloured porridge. A few prints and a few venus signs ♀ ♀ ♀ AND suddenly it's the end.

We carry on cause we don't want to stop. The audience files out and Nico joins in the painting. We take some snaps as illustrated. As we are walking across the barrack lawn in the sunset, heading for the men's showers, our favourite model runs up to us with a camera.

We pose. She shouts 'History, history — it's a cover!'

THE HAPPY END ●



'Hello, we're Christine and Jennifer Binnie. We should be on the list'

ELIZABETH HERON defies instructions to expose the 3 Mustaphas 3 as multicultural imposters. Instead, she is taken in by their Balkan charm:

FROM SZEGERERE WITH LOVE

Clashhh. A drum roll builds up to a crescendo of intensity, showering off its peak a cavorting fraternity of bass lines, harmonium chords, bongo rhythms and a leaping, screeching, begging, laughing violin.

Only the guests' faces are lit up as dusk falls on the last operatives hurrying home from the tractor factory and the old women in black chivving the bride along through the dust towards her waiting husband, resplendent in his sequined waistcoat, while on the distant hill a lone ass honks inconsolably.

The vision fades. 'Ladies and Gentlemen we have come all the way from the Balkans to be with you

in your heart. We bring you the wonderful love, life and heart attack of the 3 Mustaphas 3.'

Yes we are in Brixton, these are not the Transylvanian uplands, this is a New Variety night, and this is the most various band currently rampant on the jazz and cabaret circuits; the five Mustapha brothers who weave an international sound from their Balkan folk traditions under the musical and spiritual guidance of their beloved Uncle Patrel.

'Tonight is a very, very rare show'. Uncle Patrel was not present. 'He left me a pomegranate. On it is written; 'Best wishes boys, love Uncle'. There is a sadness when a loved one cannot be with you but also a gladness, because he sends to you, very fresh off the boat, especially his young niece. It is her debut to be here with the orchestra and with the

family; Lavra Fatima Mustapha'.

The Mustaphas were a musical but otherwise ordinary family from the little border town of Szegerey, until their Uncle Patrel, a film star, persuaded them to pursue their musical vocation internationally. This foresight saved them from a lifetime of serenading the inattendant ears of food-engrossed lovers in the restaurants of Budapest and Bucharest. They came over on a cultural exchange and eke out a frugal living in the refrigerator export business.

They have come a long way from their modest beginnings as a Balkan wedding band. In pursuit of Uncle

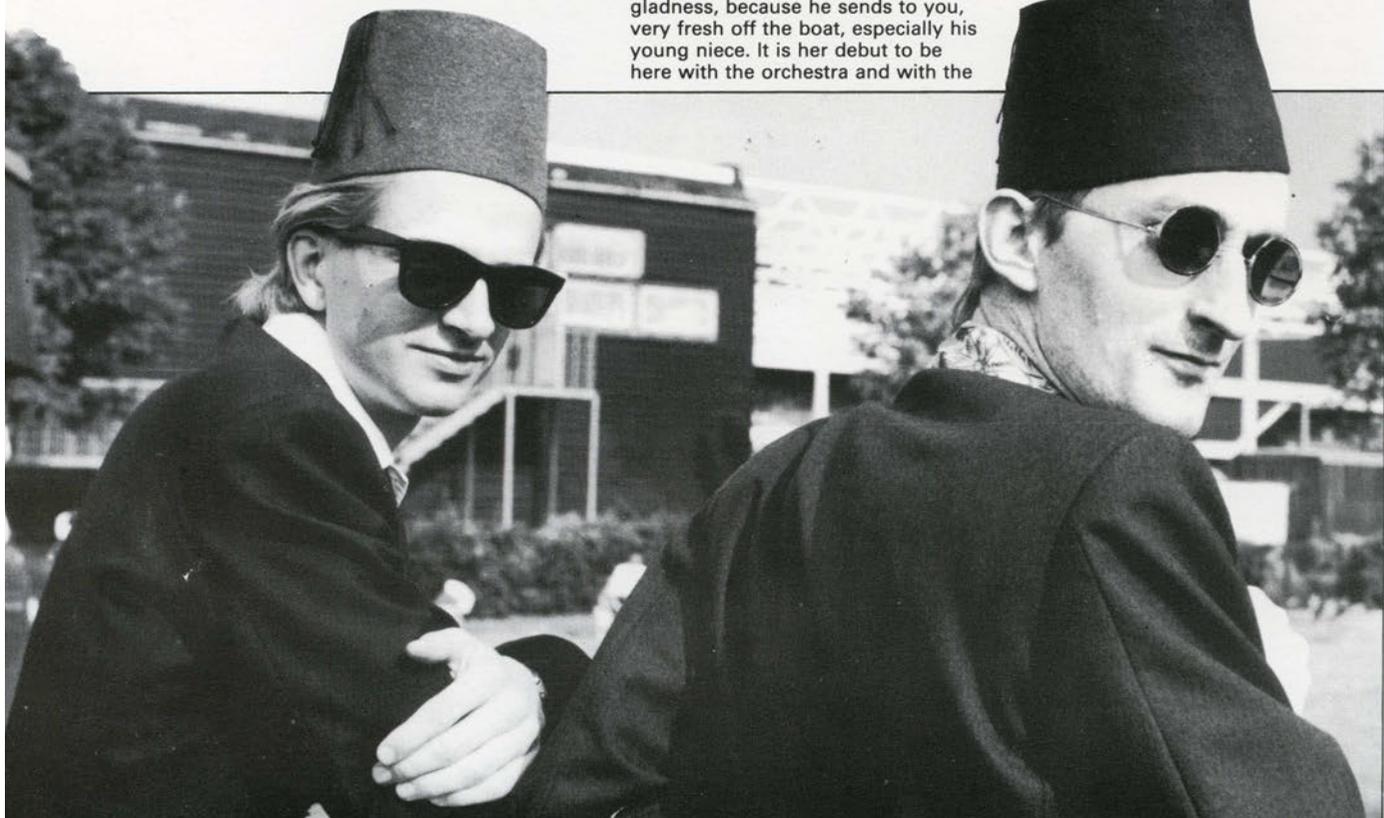


Photo: Rachel Clure

NEW YORK

REPORT

By BARBARA LEHMANN

LY

Patrel's vision, put into words by their archivist Hijaz Mustapha; 'As countries should be without boundaries', they have embraced Balkan, Lebanese, Turkish and Arabic traditions, so music should be without boundaries, as well as East and North African, American and Indian influences. And so Westernised have they become that they sport percussion styles ranging from r and b to afro-rock.

Lavra tima's eyes flash and her sultry voice modulates up and down a Wedding Dance from Valtgare Kosovare, a village near the Yugoslav-Albanian border.

Now she sings in Hebrew and then in Greek. Next the band breaks into an instrumental in a ju-ju style number from Nigeria, predominated by a Hawaiian guitar. More wedding music follows, a trumpet is brought out and then a Zurha, a high-pitched reeded instrument from Turkey.

Do they ever miss their home land? 'We are happy here. We find the people friendly.' Have they ever been back there to play? 'No. We have been to Berlin and Warsaw. In Warsaw I met a lot of groups playing reggae. They wore Rastafarian dress and were passionately involved in the music but found it hard to get hold of authentic reggae recordings. The result was something very original'. Next they go to West Berlin, this time with a great entourage of 15 musicians and two dancers; 'L'Orchestre 'BAM' de Grand Mustapha Internacional and Party'.

The East looks to the West for its cultural lead and the West scans the globe for new sounds to temper its unslakeable musicological thirst. A few look to Europe's own forgotten back yard and before they can penetrate the niceties of the gypsy orchestras and Albanian folk, their gaze is met by the inscrutable dark glasses under the sextet of fez of the 3 Mustaphas 3.

The evening draws to a close. "This is by way of tribute to a great man. A living tribute to a living hero; Uncle Patrel, sadly not here but his spirit is drinkable'. To that there is nothing to add; save a clack of the heels and the cry 'Czay Na Hopla Hoi!' " ●

So summer and autumn have gone. The tourists have returned home with their stories to tell. Another year is over. The chic boutiques and trendy new restaurants are left only with the locals who are mostly fed up with fury at things like the disappearance of St Mark's Cinema and the prospect of a new East Village Mini Mall. When the East Village Eye devotes a full page to the Death of East Village Art, you know the scene is changing. Who will survive its transformation? And how?

In October, the magnificent club 8BC was forced to close its doors thanks to tremendously expensive hassles from the fire department. Proprietors Cornelius Conboy and Dennis Gatra, the most darling of the Scene designers, nurtured a community of club performance that will get the way of history or gentrify with the rest of the neighbourhood. Ironically, earlier in the month Cornelius and Dennis were presented with Dance Theatre Workshop's prestigious BESSIE award for creative leadership. Also, 8BC was part of a 3 Event/3 Club Benefit for the homeless in NYC, and the Children in El Salvador, featuring THE ORDINAIRES and PEZ DORADOS; while the Pyramid (still going strong) hosted ETHYL EICHELBERGER, HUMAN SWITCHBOARD, ARTO LINDSAY, & ANTONIO NOGUERA. The Limbo, which has already undergone one successful transformation from Smokey Lounge Cabaret to Gallery and Experimental Theatre Space, presented ERIC BOGOSIAN, ALIEN COMIC, THE SLEAZEBUCKETS, and DIANE TORR.

Meanwhile, PS 122's resources seem to be expanding. Their activities include performances by PAT OLESZCO, JUDITH REN-LAY (presenting her acclaimed "Grandfather Tapes"), YVES MUSARD with RHYS CHATHAM and FAST FORWARD, and BEBE MILLER. Every Sunday afternoon they will host HOT HOUSE IMPROVS led by such artists as BILL GORDH, STEPHANIE SKURA, POOH KAYE, and CHARLES DENNIS. Monday nights, TIM MILLER is showing his sensitive solo performance, BUDDY SYSTEMS. And, of course, there will always be an AVANTGARDARAMA!

The Danspace Project has taken over the beautiful space at St Mark's Church.

Their autumn season included IRIS ROSE's *Of Little Women* inspired by Louisa May Alcott; JANE COMFORT, KEITH SONNIER, RICHARD LANDRY and the multi-media *TV Love*; ELLEN FISHER in a dance theatre piece called *Apsidal Suites*; the fantastic JOHN JESURUN's intergalactic premiere of *Shatteredhand Masacree-Riderless Horse*; and the world premiere of JOHN BERND's *Lost and Found*.

While the East Village undergoes its metamorphosis, the Kitchen gets ready to re-open in their huge new space in Chelsea. Even that venerable institution, Franklin Furnace is being forced to find a new space when their lease expires in December. Their last season, happily, continues with NY artists JO ANDRES (of *Liquid TV* fame), LUCY SEXTON & ANNIE LOBST (the inimitably wonderful DANCENOISE), INTERACTION ARTS (a collective composed of JERRI ALLYN, BILL GORDH, JOE LOWEREY & DEBRA WANNER); and from LA, DAVID WHEELER; Ireland's NIGEL ROLFE; and London's own RICHARD LAYZELL (Hi Richard!).

The mainstage arena performance in American is the elegant Brooklyn Academy of Music. Their star-studded season has opened with PINA BAUSCH & COMPANY, followed by ROBERT WILSON's *The Golden Windows*. The rest of their season includes West Coast Choreographer MARGARET JENKINS: a LAURA DEAN/STEVE REICH collaboration; CHRIS HARDMAN and the California-based ANTENNA THEATRE; and *The Birth of a Poet* staged by RICHARD FOREMAN, with a text by KATHY ACKER, set by DAVID SALLE and a score by PETER GORDON. This should be something special to see!

Though she is not always considered part of the performance scene, I feel compelled to mention LILY TOMLIN's amazing residence this autumn on Broadway. She captures the cult of culture as it appears on the streets and she invests it with a rare humour. And believe me, humour helps.

It's got so that Downtown and Uptown have become more like Downstage and Upstage. Keep your eyes open. Performance is where you find it. ●

PREVIEW

LIVE ART NOW



● Richard Layzell in *Faces Words and Definitions* at Chisenhale, December 16. Info 01 981 6617



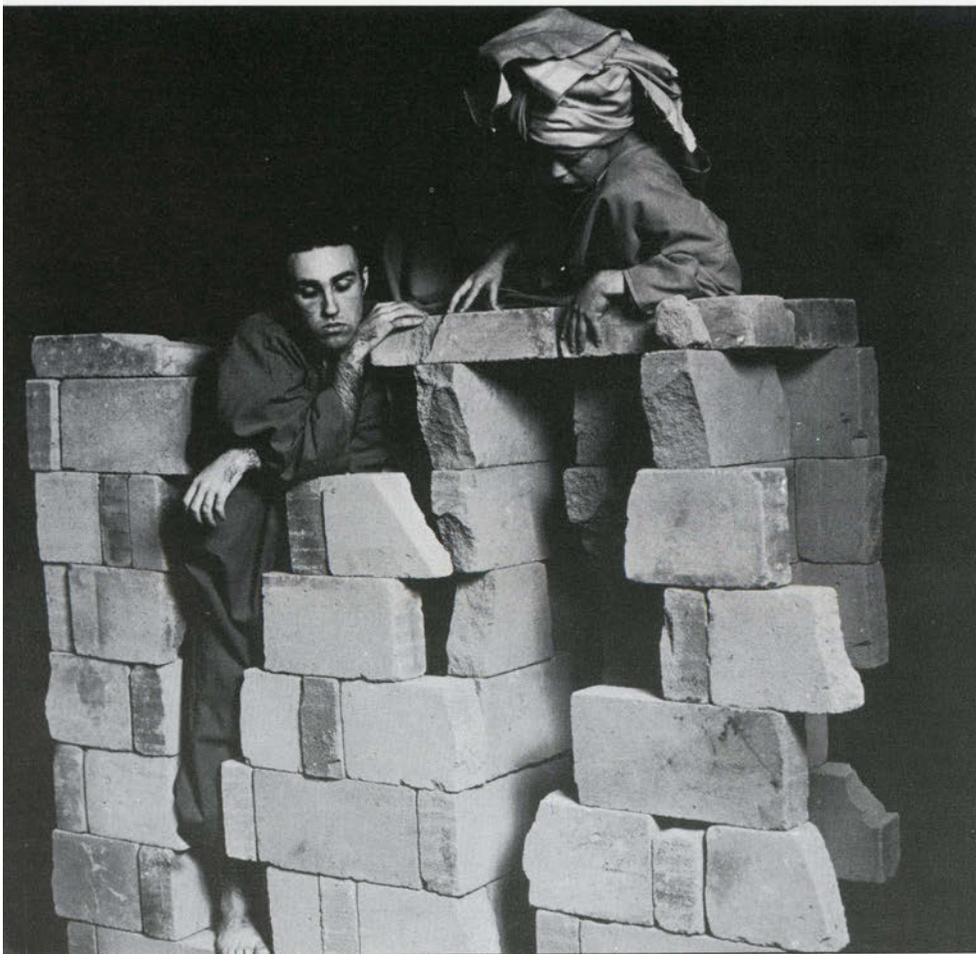
● RT Productions continue their *Falling* tour at The Place until December 14. After that *Trickster* in Charavari until January 4. Info 01 387 0031



● Hester Lucy Stanhope, an intrepid early explorer, is the inspiration for performances by Hermine, Harry Kipper, the Neo-Naturalists, Ian Hinchcliffe, Mona Hatoum, Anne Bean and others December 15 at a new venue. Info 01 987 1046



● Steve Reich (see interview and ads for tour details) gives a talk at the ICA on January 28. Info 01 930 3647



The gravity-defying aspect of Station House Opera's spectacle has always been carefully balanced: the mechanics of the 'flying dream' have shared equal prominence. Ambiguity is courted in the imagery, the soaring figure which evokes a freedom from constraint is at the same time a performer bound up in a harness struggling for control of the apparatus. The new work *A Split Second of Paradise* involves the use of a thousand breeze blocks to build and rebuild structures that free and entomb the builders in a constantly mutating world. The building blocks and the recycled material with which they are made becomes a central motif. They look strong/heavy but are in fact fragile: their nature is part of a play on permanence and impermanence. The theatrical means constitute an ironic contrast to the grandiose religious theme. Meanings are made on a shifting ground where historical events are interpreted, revised and invented. A split second of Paradise to an innocent Adam and Eve would be an eternity and the notion of Paradise would make no sense. With Station House Opera a motion always produces a counter-motion. Meanings multiply or disappear and a narrative collapses under the weight of possibilities. Their work is a mix of a grandiose dream with a mundane, material reality. (Gary Stevens)

A Split Second of Paradise plays at the Midland Group, Nottingham on 5th, 6th and 7th of December, at 7.30 pm, and in London at Acme Studios, 234 Old Ford Road, E3 on 11th-14th, 16th and 17th December at 8pm. Information and bookings 0602-582 636/ 01-720 5841. ■

PREVIEW



● Also at ICA performance by Nigel Rolfe (above) January 23-24. Also until Xmas, *The Magic Flute* (see article)



● Fallout Marching band, activist street band has a song book out — *Take the Toys from the Boys*, £2.50, from 26 Loughborough Park London SW9 8TR



● Brecht's *Designer*, Casper Neher (the above from the 1931 production of *Man equals Man*) coming to Riverside studios Jan 15-Feb 6. Also at Riverside: Billie Whitelaw in her Beckett trilogy January 29-February 9



● Simon Herbert, above, is one of the many artists to take part in New Work Newcastle, another big performance event for Britain. See back page for details. Info 0632 614527

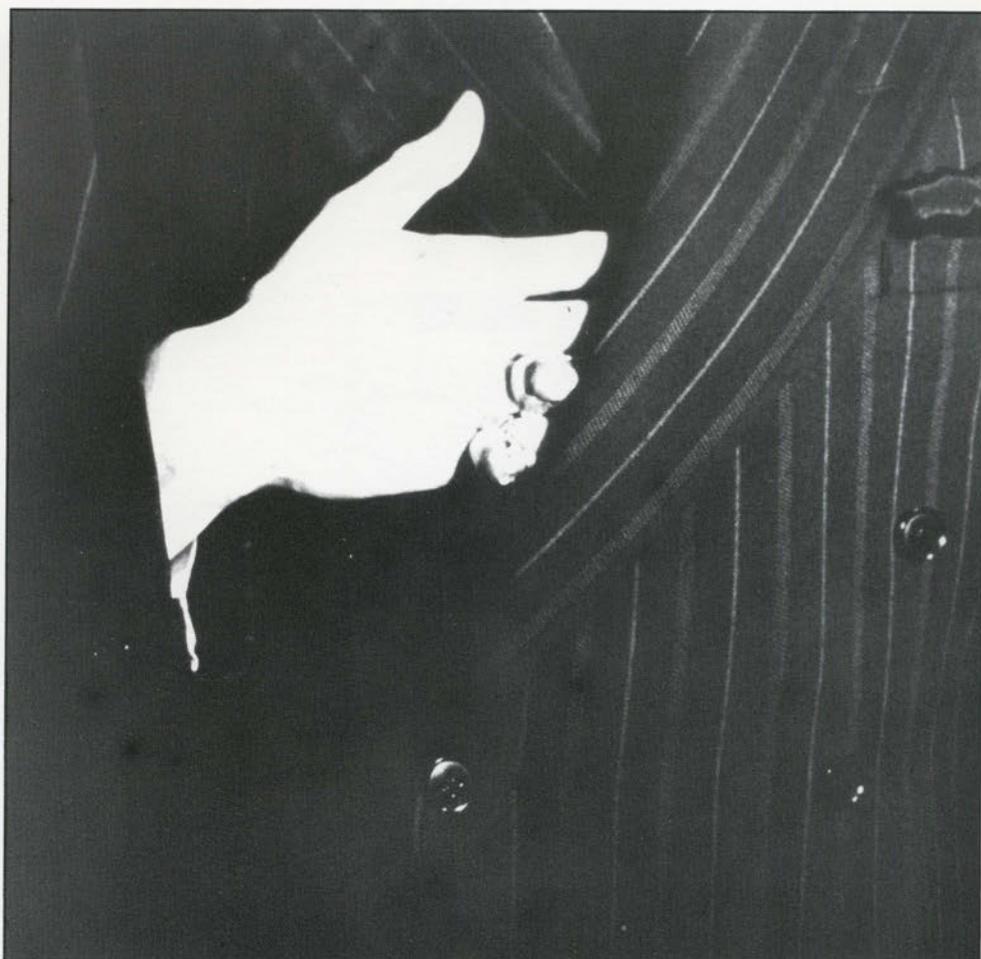
Anthony Wilson's tape/slide piece *Gods and Gangsters*, from which this is an individual image uses rapid slide projection and sound, and flicks up a repeating sequence in which a smart suited man moves his ringed hand down and across his jacket in a series of gestures. The face is not revealed.

Gods and Gangsters is included in *Hand Signals* at Ikon, Birmingham, from 14 December 1985 to 18 January 1986. The show tours to The Milton Keynes Exhibition Gallery from 1 February to 1 March. The show includes Conrad Atkinson, Tony Bevan, Stuart Brisley, Helen Chadwick, Eileen Cooper, Victoria Ellis, Susan Hiller, John Hilliard, Jefford Horrigan, Alexis Hunter, Tina Keane, Richard Long, June Redfern, Anthony Wilson, Vincent Woropay.

Each work in the exhibition includes an image/images of a hand/hands.

The aim of the show is to raise questions about the ways in which the hand is used as an image, and from this encourage discussion/curiosity about the relationship between the creator, art object/independent image and the audience or as Anthony Wilson describes it 'respondent'.

Info. 021 643 0708 ■



PERFORMANCE

Fireworks at a recent debate on Live Art and criticism. NEIL BUTLER sums up the attitudes and proposes a strategy:

DOES NOT EXIST

Fuelled by a preview of Rob La Frenais' critical article in the last issue, critic Anthony Howell recently entertained the first Banquet Debate of the '8 Days Review of Live Art' in Nottingham with a gratuitously inflammatory speech that endorsed a formalisation or performance. He suggested the establishment of a school of performance that would apparently ingratiate performance artists to the critical art establishment. He suggests that performance art is a discipline that would benefit from being contained, from having rules, conventions and perhaps by implication exams and prizes. The response to this lecture varied from hysterical disbelief to measured approval. However, few doubted his utter commitment to the medium and his own talents as a performer (that were later amply demonstrated at The Garage disco.)

The discussion that he opened was developed privately and publicly in a series of conversations, debates and forums. The debate was not about developing schools and pigeonholes for a disinterested and frequently hostile press. The real debate was on how to develop a strategy that would allow Live Art to grow as a medium.

Howell's arguments for formalising the area are important because they reveal a natural sense of insecurity about what we are doing. Performance is a vague area — Live Art a catch all phrase.

If you are involved in a field of endeavour that is ill defined, has no rules, little history and apparently no sense of direction, you might be forgiven for feeling insecure. Especially so when these characteristics make your 'product' as an artist difficult to buy, sell or be written about. The difficulty is that Howell is probably right. The formalisation that he desires will doubtless make 'performance' more palatable to funding organisations and the press. Unfortunately it will also push into the ghetto work that does not fit and aggravate the situation for those people involved in non-formal work. Similarly Howell is correct when he argues that the discipline of formalism produces high quality work. It could also be argued that the discipline of playing in a cabaret format to a non art audience at the Zap Club also encourages high quality work. That does not however suggest that the Zap Club approach is the only one that is suitable for Performance.

The point is that Performance does not exist. It is a vaguely relevant description for a body of work that does not sit comfortably in any of the pigeonholes provided by our vocabulary or culture.

The fact that there is any relationship between the artists who

describe their work as 'Performance' is more to do with the shared adversity of their situation than the shared area of their work.

Yet the extraordinary thing is that during 8 Days for the first time there appeared to be a sense of community among the people present. The work was exciting and of a generally high standard. The debate turned to ways of sustaining and encouraging such work.

The strategy that this article proposes grew out of the selection procedure that was developed for '8 Days' moderated by the observations of those present at the debates. It takes advantage of an approach to programming that generates large audiences for experimental work by mixing art with entertainment so:

A network of venues is developed that would be prepared to host 'platform' events. The venues would be geographically placed around the country so that any artist would have a venue within reasonable reach. They would either have a history of support for experimental work or would produce experimental work — colleges are an obvious choice.

Events would be arranged where local performers could showcase their work for selection for a travelling platform. The venues could include entertainment in the programme and if they are colleges collaborate with the students union to promote the event. In effect a series of mini-festivals would be created that would draw together local artists and develop an audience for the work.

From such events artists would be selected to take part in a travelling platform that would visit all the participatory venues. This would also feature entertainment on the programme. A side effect of the proposal is that it would create an infrastructure of local and national links between administrators and artistes developing experimental work. It would also be relatively cheap to set up.

The main advantage of this approach is that it creates support for where the action is. There are hundreds of artists whose work is relevant, exciting and experimental. There is a potential audience for that work. This strategy provides an opportunity for the artists and the audience to come together. If the groundswell of their opinions then demands more venues and more events or, God help us, formalism and an Institute of Performance then will occur. ●

Neil Butler would be interested to hear from any individuals or institutions who would like to discuss this scheme. Write to the Zap Club, 8 Tichborne Street, Brighton BN1 1UR.

WRITERS WANTED FOR THE NEW YEAR

With a sympathetic interest in the areas we cover. You should be able to write about experimental work clearly, challengingly, and critically. All new artforms to be covered, from live art to video and installation, from visual theatre to new dance and from music to cultural topics, but we are particularly interested in articles on women's work and experimental work by black artists.

Phone the Editor on 01 935 2714 (24 Hrs)

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NEW WORK NEWCASTLE 86 is a major festival of new performance work organised by Tyne and Wear County Council Museums and Projects U.K. (Newcastle Media Workshops) and will be presented in the Laing Art Gallery and in various outside locations throughout Newcastle.

NEW WORK NEWCASTLE

86

The issues and content of the performances in NEW WORK NEWCASTLE 86 will be expanded in an exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery and will form the basis of a unique 'PERFORMANCE ART IN EDUCATION' programme in Tyne and Wear Schools throughout the Spring term of 1986. A publication will accompany the exhibition and festival.

29th	SIMON HERBERT Lunchtime Lecture	JANUARY
31st	NIGEL ROLFE	JANUARY
6th-7th	BRUCE McLEAN Angus McCubban/David Ward	FEBRUARY
13th	PETER McRAE Projects U.K. Commission	FEBRUARY
14th	BOW GAMELAN ENSEMBLE	FEBRUARY
20th	TARA BABEL Projects U.K. Commission	FEBRUARY
21st	GARY STEPHENS	FEBRUARY
27th	SARAH JANE EDGE Projects U.K. Commission	FEBRUARY
28th	MONA HATOUM	FEBRUARY
3rd-7th	ALISTAIR MACLENNAN	MARCH
5th	STEPHEN TAYLOR WOODROW Projects U.K. Commission	MARCH
7th	NICK STEWART Projects U.K. Commission	MARCH
10th-14th	STUART BRISLEY	MARCH
14th	KATHY ACKER	MARCH
14th	MONICA ROSS GILLIAN ALLNUTT Projects U.K. Commission	MARCH
20th	SIMON HERBERT Projects U.K. Commission	MARCH
21st	SILVIA ZIRANEK	MARCH
21st	JOHN CARSON	MARCH

For further details contact

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