

Listening to Daisy digest

One of the most gratifying things in following new music activity is being able to watch the progress of a composer as his work evolves toward clearer and stronger statements. The music of Joel Chadabe and Garrett List had never made much of an impression on me, but when I heard some of their recent works in concerts last week, things began to crystallize.

Chadabe is the only composer I know of who is seriously involved with automatic electronic music. Instead of composing sounds to be produced by machines, he works out computer programs which allow the machines to compose spontaneously by themselves. Some of his earlier works seemed more experimental than musical. But in his latest work, which also involves a live performer, the machines have become quite alive and engaging.

In this performance of "Echoes" trombonist Jim Fulkerson sat under a blue light at the back of WBAI's Studio C, playing into a microphone. Intermittently he played soft eerie tones of one sort or another, occasionally inserting a brief melodic line or some sliding pattern. As he played these fragments, they were fed into a rather sophisticated homemade computer named "Daisy," which processed the trombonist's messages and relayed responses to the conglomeration of electronic equipment which was placed auspiciously on a large table at the front of the room. After brief delays, the equipment replied to the fragments played by the trombonist. Sometimes the replies were simply an electronic imitation of what he had just played. Sometimes they were similar but on a different pitch. Sometimes the machines made a big deal out of something the trombonist did, and mocked him quite elaborately on four different channels. Sometimes they paused a long time before deciding on a response. Sometimes they became ob-

stinate and did not respond at all.

In general, the electronic sounds were rather somber. They were not attempting to outdo the live musician. They stuck to the subject, and it was always clear that they were actually responding to the trombonist and not just going off on tangents of their own. But at the same time, the responses were never predictable and always remained a puzzle for the listener. And apparently Daisy was taking care of everything, as the composer made very few adjustments in the equipment during the performance.

Chadabe's "Shadows and Lines" is similar to "Echoes" but slightly less stimulating because there is no performer. The machines react solely to themselves, moving within the many variations and sequences which are possible within the limitations set by the composer and his program. In "Drift," which is one of Chadabe's earlier attempts at automatic electronic music, the sounds are more violent in nature, and they do not seem to "drift," despite the title. The sequences are more forced, and the sounds do not fulfill themselves as easily and naturally as in the more recent works. The program was given on November 22 at WBAI's Free Music Store.

I HEARD LIST'S new work, "A Self for Your Self," at the Kitchen on November 21. Like much of his music, it is concerned with using a limited number of pitches. But here, instead of writing for amplified concert instruments, he has drawn on his jazz background and utilized vibes, electric bass, and piano, brass, drums, and two female singers. He obviously feels more comfortable with this ensemble, and some of the ideas that never quite worked in other contexts work very well here.

The piece begins with only the two singers and only two notes. Gradually the instruments and the other pitches are added until, about 15 or 20 minutes into the piece, the music works up to a full seven-tone scale and a very high rich sound. A few extra dissonant notes are brought in for the climax of the piece, which is a veritable whirr of sensual music. I never could tell what the lyrics were all about, but it didn't seem to matter.

There is probably some influence of Steve Reich and Philip Glass here, because the repeated

melodic patterns used in List's textures are similar to theirs. But it sounds very different, not only because of the jazz instrumentation and the climactic formal plan, but also because it develops musicians greater freedom and is not so concerned with details.

List's "A Sad Song," an improvisation for a similar ensemble, which was supposed to be limited to three notes, was seriously marred by an unnamed cellist. He just could not bring himself to stick to those same three notes and was generally unable to tune in on what the rest of the ensemble was trying to do.

NO NEWS from the Group for Contemporary Music. Their concert on November 20 was not appreciably different from any concert of theirs I have been to in the past 10 years. The music continues for more than about 30 seconds without introducing new material. Most of the music is concerned with exploring all the possibilities of the instruments and using them to produce sounds which, historically, they were never intended to produce. The music is very difficult to play, and even the capable performers hired for this concert were not able to perform it comfortably. The emotional qualities range between slightly energetic and slightly subdued, but are usually rather dry. None of the music seemed particularly good or particularly bad.

—Tom Johnson

RICHARD WAGNER's "Siegfried," in which assorted men, monsters, and gods go bump in the night, came back to the Metropolitan Opera November 17 in a production nominally new but three years late. This big dark-and-light work had not been heard in New York since the winter of 1961-1962, and it was wonderful to have it back as conducted by Erich Leinsdorf with much of the power, pace, and technical skill the score continuously demands.

This opera is the third part of a New York adaptation of the complete "Ring of the Nibelung" staged and conducted by Herbert von Karajan for his Salzburg Easter Festivals of 1967 through 1970 and recorded by him for DGG. The Metropolitan side of the triple entente had been un-

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ALICE TULLY HALL
SAT. DEC. 2 / 8:00 PM

ROMAN
TOTENBERG

VIOLIN
ARTUR BALSAM
PIANO
The Boston University String Players
Bach: Sonata in G minor;
Stravinsky: Duo Concertante;

FRIDAY, Dec. 1, 7:30 p.m.

SPONTANEOUS SOUND

A Concert by

The Cubiculo Presents