

9/00

Music Review

A Myth to This Opera

By: Bob Groves

Woody Vasulka never said it would be easy Wednesday night.

"This will take a certain amount of endurance from all of you. So, good luck," he told his audience at Media Study/Buffalo, 207 Delaware Ave.

Woody Vasulka is a Czechoslovakian video pioneer and electronics artist in his early 40s. On Wednesday he presented "*An Examination of Media in Application on the Space, Performance and Myth of Operatic Forms (Part I)*." Parts II and III will be performed at 8 p.m. Feb. 21 and April 11 respectively.

He's a "Minimalist"

Only there is no Verdi, Puccini or recognizable opera music in this "exploratory performance" work. Vasulka, you see, is an electronic "minimalist," someone who takes art down to its sub-atomic particles.

"Operatic doesn't mean it has a voice, say, a tenor. I see it as a more synthetic form of stage cinema in some way," said Vasulka. "I interpret 'operatic' as 'operational.'" "

In the middle of Media Study/Buffalo's three-story sound-proof studio, Vasulka set up a table of projectors, screens, tape recorders, amplifiers and a chair for assistant Richard Henderson, a University of Buffalo graduate student who wore a three-piece suit.

Improvises Role

As electronic music droned, twittered, hummed and clanked, and projectors beamed through blue and cerise filters, Henderson improvised his part as the human and therefore least controllable element in the system.

At various moments, Henderson ululated, shouted, "Yeah, I feel alright," preached revolution, flashed lights at the audience, kibbitzed with Vasulka over a hand-held microphone and made half-hearted attempts at structured activity and thought.

TV Sets Come On

Much the same happened in the second half of the program except that Vasulka had added a stack of four TV sets turned to perpetual after-the-late-show-midnight-meditation "snow." Symbols resembling TV test patterns, civil defense signs and targets were projected on the wall. Vasulka also informed Henderson for this part that he was no longer the center of attention.

"Most of this was a rehearsal for the speakers," Vasulka explained after the performance. "I found them controllable."

Brain Is Forced

"The analytical portion of your mind breaks down completely here, forcing the brain to listen to commands," Henderson added by way of explanation. There is no doubt valuable, entertaining work afoot here, but it was a relief to hear Henderson improvise toward the conclusion: "We have to be honest with these people. This all looks like something but it really isn't."

Vasulka and his Icelandic wife, Steina, have performed extensively in Europe and New York City, where in 1971 they founded the Kitchen video theater forum. Vasulka joined the UB Center for Media Study as an associate in 1974.

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