

PROGRAM NOTES FOR AN ELECTRIC EAR CONCERT:  
HILLER, REYNOLDS, SUBOTNICK, MARTIN, & MARTIRANO

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One of the problems in theorizing about art is the need for making up transitional concepts as a result of having divided things into categories as a first concern. Today we seem to be faced with the task of recombining those elements of art and music that used to be framed, detached, and categorized. After a one hundred and fifty year separation of elements that seems to be the Renaissance legacy, the closing of the media gap comes to a thundering culmination or maybe a thundering beginning here at the Electric Circus.

But let's not call it a mixing of the media or the multi—multi--something or the avant groove. Our problem is not simply that of filling an environmental space with the many facets of sensory input. Susanne Langer said, "The various arts exhibit a striking unity and logic". We are led to the point of visualizing a general unity and logic by the mediation of carefully controlled, refined, considered, (whether by intuition, feeling, or logical system), discrete, and specifically oriented events or elements. Let's not fall into the trap of the "fallacy of abstraction" of the most obvious properties of materials of a particular medium and try to solve it by mere saturation of yes, still separate and framed media. Saturation resulting from the "fallacy of abstraction" leaves our senses awash with an indeterminate gestalt. It is like whipped cream on a bad cake, a senseless ornamentation as euphemism in language. Is this the Neo-Rococo age fraught with frills and overproducing?

No! It is not. A collection of media does not make for interesting media. No epicurean delights in simple mixed eating. Our interest at present is in one integrated, all-inclusive medium that we hope to present.

The works in the existing repertoire of this medium seem to orient their attack around one or several of three areas of perception and performance: theatrical, environmental, and participation. The technology of each is different and we have examples of all of them. They are all environmental, existing so within the environment of the Electric Circus. As one must never make the mistake of competing with an existing environment that can't be changed, these pieces do not. It will be obvious that each of the works contains different inherent qualities and possibilities of adapting to available spaces.

A TRIPTYCH FOR HIERONYMUS, (1966), by Lejaren Hiller is a meeting ground for more elements of modern sound production techniques than anything that comes to mind. In its original version it is a mammoth collage of sound from our daily lives, animals, and an instrumental ensemble that rivals any other in size, as well as from the computer and electronic music studio. Its theatrical and visual elements, here presented by Powell Shepherd and George Talbot respectively, are equally immense. It has been performed,

however, very successfully in several condensed versions including that presented here and another version for two pianos and stereo tape. The performance technology tonight rests more on the visual element than anywhere else. Mr. Talbot uses many banks of slide projectors with special Buchla computer oriented control equipment, here provided by the Electric Circus, to achieve the extremely rapid pace of visual sequencing. Such a performance can also be reproduced with many people performing on the slide projectors according to a score made just as if they were playing musical instruments.

Mr. Hiller's techniques of collage, sometimes reminiscent of Ives, present a meeting of strong timely social elements. The music is very theatrical and many of the musical choices seem to be for their most giant-like and sometimes unexpected dramatic impact. One feels that the intense sensory bombardment is carefully calculated in its information content to produce a defined degree of distortion in the reception of messages. As one sees in the related Bosch paintings the gross juxtaposition of conceptual reality, the grit of worldly life, violent theater, and a little theater of cruelty, he sees it even more prevalent in this total media presentation of Hiller, Talbot, and Shepherd.

PING, (1968), by Roger Reynolds, shows the greatest degree of actual electronic performance of the music presented here tonight. First, all of the live instruments are amplified with ordinary PA equipment. In addition, they are sent, via a rapid switching mechanism, into a ring modulator where they are modulated with a signal from an audio generator. The sound is then distributed among four output channels with a photocell sound distributor. Actual parts for the ring modulator and the photocell sound distributor are written in the prerecorded tape. The equipment for this piece is easily packaged and performed and can be sent from performance to performance or built by a competent audio engineer.

One is reminded in Reynolds of a large repertoire of careful and imaginative instrumental music such as his QUICK ARE THE MOUTHS OF EARTH, and good theater in such pieces as the EMPEROR OF ICE CREAM. PING's long involvement with slowly changing materials and economy of means are particularly arresting. Its visual elements include a setting of the story by Samuel Beckett of the same name.

PLAY! 4, (1965), by Morton Subotnick and Anthony Martin is the one participation piece on tonight's program. Certain members of the audience have been asked to participate and instructed in several games, which are the moving force of the piece. The two films by Mr. Martin are the visual score for the game format and the succession of game possibilities. Each of the players is provided with game boards for 4 games: SIGNALS, LOVEME, CELEBRATION, and ENDPLOY! The first three of them have a calculated degree of possible stalemate built in which controls to a great degree the actions of the instrumentalists and soprano. The two conductor figures are participants in the games. The musical sound is a combination of instrumental and vocal elements with electronic sounds.

The uses of such game processes in a live composition are particularly engaging because they present an immediacy of contact with the piece and the ability to watch the human relationships in it develop and influence the piece as it grows.

This kind of freedom and intimacy seem to always be qualities of the developments in media for which Mr. Subotnick and Mr. Martin are responsible. Mr. Subotnick, who uses some of the most advanced methods of electronic music synthesis today never loses his aesthetic to technology and it has been remarked that Mr. Martin is one of the most accomplished people in filling rooms with transistors specifically to make people free.

The economy of technology in this piece makes it ideal for easy packaging. One need only supply the two 16mm film projectors with appropriate lenses, instrumentalists, game players, and stereo tape playback.

Attune to the theme of transitions one can see in Salvatore Martirano's L'sGA, (1968), a remarkable application of musical disciplines and processes to Ron Nameth's films. An extremely high example of the integration of media, the measure of tension and the use of psychological time is awesomely powerful.

The novelty of doing the things that were supposedly taboo in the past is worn off. It isn't easy to do things as jokes anymore and get away with it. Martirano isn't merely doing the tabooed thing, (such as using pieces of a pornographic film), but is using symbols as instruments of structure and motivation rather than as just representations.

Mr. Martirano is a master at taking advantage of the particular and very special qualities of certain individually unique performers. He has, for the past several years, been associated with a group of such people at the University of Illinois. One needs only to recall such pieces as UNDERWORLD and BALLAD to be reminded of saxophonist-clarinetist Ron Dewar and singer-pianist-organist-flutist Don Smith. The meeting ground for all these people has been in the highly original improvisation group, THE BORDER GUARD. L'sGA is a perfect example of this in its stunning use of poet Michael Holloway.

This piece also produces its power with an economy of technical means. Three 16mm film projectors must be supplied along with stereo tape system, gas mask with microphone installed, and a tank of helium. The tape was produced at the University of Illinois Experimental Music Studio.

Does history show us a time in which there is evidence that its people were not aware of multi-media? Certainly not. Infatuation with multi-media is not a new concern. It's really infatuation with the technological age which creates new media methods all of the time. Composers are now supplying packages of equipment to go with the scores of their pieces. Maybe the age of publishers will give way to the age of distribution of electronic packages.

In any case, all our senses are always on and it's pretty hard to isolate them. Radio actors are schooled in making their audience "see" the story. Television actors are schooled in making their audience "feel" the story. Environmentalists are schooled in making their audience "... the story.

Paul McCartney once said: "With any kind of thing, my aim seems to be to distort it, distort it from what we know it as, even with music and visual things and to change it from what it is to see what it could be. To see the potential in it all, to take a note and wreck it and see in that note what else there is in it, that a simple act like distorting it has caused. To take a film and to superimpose on top of it so you can't quite tell what it is anymore, it's all trying to create magic, it's all trying to make things happen so that you don't know why they've happened. I'd like a lot more things to happen like they did when you were kids, when you didn't know how the conjuror did it, and were happy to just sit there and say, 'Well it's magic.'"