

# Soup Fight

**N**o one was surprised to see Robert Ashley and Thomas Buckner stand up to perform at the Kitchen November 18. But it was a shock to see singers Sam Ashley and Jacqueline Humbert walk up behind them on a video screen, live from Santa Monica, the four standing calmly in a row as though they weren't 3000 miles apart.

As the other three crooned softly and echoed a phrase here and there, Ashley read "Empire," the gently funny anecdote about the invention of tomato soup from his opera *Atalanta*. In Ashley's rambling version, Heinz and Campbell battled for the right to sell tomato soup, which indigents originally made during the Depression by adding catsup and salt to boiling water, all free ingredients at most restaurants. As each gesture Ashley made flashed across the continent and back to reappear onscreen two seconds later, he ended: "Look out the window for a moment. Look at the world. This is where we live. This is it."

**KYLE GANN**

