

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO, MUSIC
AND DANCE

New York Times
April 15, 1979

Laurie Anderson Offers An Avant-Garde Show

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Laurie Anderson has been doing performance art of one sort or another on the SoHo scene for several years, now, but this writer hadn't encountered her in some time. Friday night she offered a major showcase of her work, a full program (only one hour long but full, nonetheless) entitled "Americans on the Move: Parts One and Two" with several collaborators at the Kitchen, repeated last night. It was a fascinating, charming and telling occasion, and it suggested that Miss Anderson has become a really important force on the American avant-garde scene.

Any truly interesting artist has to exude individuality, and that Miss Anderson does: she's striking looking in her spare, severe way; she plays the violin adeptly and her work in general is suffused with an arresting blend of gentle humor and a more troubling disorientation.

But her work is also interesting for its synthetic aspects. The synthesis is apparent first of all because Miss Anderson carries the whole, tired notion of "mixed media" into a new and more elevated realm. She is a composer and musical performer. But she's also a visual artist and an actress and a film maker, and a good deal more adept in all these fields, both technically and esthetically, than many SoHo multimedia artists manage.

Yet what struck one Friday was the

way in which the whole transcended the parts. The numerous bits and pieces of her program flowed together seamlessly. There was no linear "plot" or unfolding of an obvious artistic argument, to be sure. But the work cohered, all the same.

Miss Anderson's art is synthetic in another sense, too, in that like several other performance artists now active in New York, she makes use of a musical idiom whose simple, rocking rhythms, childlike diatonicism and humorous innocence suggest a kind of avant-garde pop.

Yet at the same time (like Robert Ashley, Blue Gene Tyranny and Peter Gordon — who assisted her on Friday — and others of this ilk) she has a sharp ear for unusual sounds; many of those sounds on Friday came via an electronic setup that altered voices in most peculiar ways. And like these other artists, she overlays the music with wonderfully understated, all-American stories and prose poems in the fashion of a melodrame.

It is almost impossible to capture the impact of all this except in live performance. Records deprive one of the visuals, gallery installations seem distant and detached, video compresses things cruelly. Miss Anderson has to be seen and heard in person. And for anyone remotely interested in where American art is going, she should be.

Board of
Directors

Robert Ashley
Paula Cooper
Suzanne Delehanty
Philip Glass
Barbara London
Mary MacArthur
Barbara Pine
Carlota Schoolman
Robert Stearns
John Stewart
Caroline Thorne
Paul Walter

HALEAKALA, INC.
59 WOOSTER
NEW YORK,
NEW YORK
10012
(212) 925-3615