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# A Smorgasbord Of Musical Morsels At the Kitchen



The New York Times/Jack Manning

Professor Pinpin, of the musical group Zazou Bikaye, at the Kitchen tomorrow night.

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

**S**TRANGE MUTATIONS," the adventurous three-week music series that opened last night at the Kitchen, offers a feast of musical hybrids designed to re-tune the most jaded New York ears. This weekend, music explorers who have been able to follow transcultural fusions from overseas only through import records can hear first hand some of the cult sensations of the European club circuit. Next week, the series will pay tribute to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from jazz, blues and Caribbean musical perspectives. In its final week, the smorgasbord will include Japanese synthesizer music, experimental music-video from West Germany and an anti-apartheid rock-funk extravaganza.

"I think of 'Strange Mutations' as a

quasi-festival," Bob Wisdom, the music director of the Kitchen, said recently in its spacious new Chelsea home at 512 West 19th Street. "It's a kinky title, but underneath there's a real seriousness of intent. Whether it's jazz or new music or pop, I believe that everything we present speaks to the times."

Most of the performers appearing this weekend are associated with Crammed Disc, the prestigious independent Belgian record company founded in the 1970's by the musician and producer Mark Hollander. The French-African group Zazou Bikaye, the Belgian-Israeli art-rock group Minimal Compact and the New York musician and poet Jayne Bliss have all recorded for Crammed Disc. Making its United States debut is the London-based female Japanese duo Frank Chickens, whose pop songs poke savage fun at stereotypes of Oriental women. Sunday afternoon will bring a tribute to the Hungarian composer Gyorgy Ligeti, who is best known for the psychedelic "cloud music" used in the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey."

"Strange Mutations" is the first major series to be programmed by Mr. Wisdom since he became the Kitchen's music director a year ago. A Washington native who came to New York in 1972, he worked as the program director at the Columbia University radio station, WKCR. College radio led him into the experimental downtown New York music scene.

"I had grown up on funk music and pop radio," Mr. Wisdom said recently. "When I came to New York, my world started turning inside out after I discovered Albert Ayler and John Coltrane, and Miles Davis had just put out the album 'Bitches Brew.' I discovered the Kitchen in the early 70's and have been involved ever since."

A passionate spokesman for what he calls "intercultural communication," Mr. Wisdom has traveled extensively in search of music that brings together different musical worlds.

"I spent three months in Europe this summer, including a lot of time in Paris," he said. "One of the most exciting radio stations in Europe is Radio Nova, a Parisian pirate station. A lot of the music they programmed was by musicians who played in tiny boites, some of which were just holes in the wall. That's where I heard Zazou Bikaye, who combine North African, Central African and Parisian sensibilities into a dance music that transfixed me."

Zazou Bikaye, which is performing on a double bill tomorrow night with Frank Chickens, is a seven-member

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ensemble led by the Algerian electronic composer Hector Zazou and Sony Bikaye, a Zairian singer. The two, who now reside in Paris, have developed an effervescent style of music that electronically synthesizes European dance and African tribal rhythms. Mr. Zazou, who has studied classical music, composes jubilantly heady electronic music that inflects European dance-pop with the vocal drone of traditional North African music and the smoky circular percussive rhythms of Central African pop. The ensemble includes three backup voices, horns and percussion that are all used to augment a largely prerecorded soundtrack. The combination gives the feeling of a 15-to-20-piece band.

Frank Chickens, which shares the program with Zazou Bikaye tomorrow, fuses Oriental and Western modes into musical parody, inspired

in part by Monty Python shows, that has captured the imagination of the British rock press. The duo, Kazuko Hohki and Kazumi Taguchi, went to England from Tokyo in 1978. Their act, which makes fun of Japanese kitsch culture, involves not only singing but also mime, slow-motion movement and rapid and exotic changes of costume. Performing to backing tapes, the duo sings in an odd pidgin argot that is part Japanese and part English. One of their signature songs, "We Are Ninja (Not Geisha)," lightheartedly expresses their rejection of the stereotype of Japanese women as submissive.

Minimal Compact and Jayne Bliss and Beautifier, who are sharing the bill tonight, represent a more orthodox transcultural art-rock. All five members of the Brussels-based band Minimal Compact come from Jerusalem, and the group performs in English and Hebrew. Its best music — like the title cut of its fourth album,

"Raging Souls" — has an entranced psychedelic intensity of multiple electric guitars, and dark symbolist lyrics. The guitarist and poet Jayne Bliss is a New Yorker who made her name abroad and has performed infrequently in the United States. Crammed Disc artists, she and her band, Beautifier, stir up a highly guitar-based art-rock, without drums or percussion. Angst-ridden incantatory lyrics recall the poetry of Patti Smith, taken to a more abstract and intuitive level.

## A New Ligeti Work

The retrospective tribute to Gyorgy Ligeti on Sunday afternoon will include the world premiere of a piano work, performed by Yvar Mikhashoff; a horn trio; a woodwind quintet, and two tape pieces, "Glissandi" and "Articulation."

"Ligeti is a personal favorite composer," Mr. Wisdom said. "He is in his 60's and ailing. I want to show that

older composers have as much place in our program as emerging ones."

"I'm not interested in any categories like 'new wave' or 'the cutting edge,' because distinctions like that are artificial," Mr. Wisdom added. "It's unfortunate that in New York City, where it should be happening, musical cultures aren't really interfacing, and with the decline of the downtown club scene there are no places one can hear experimental new acts from abroad. In Europe and in Africa, people are listening to everything, even country and western. Fela Kuti, the Nigerian musician, has said that music is the weapon of the future, because it's such an incredibly powerful way to dissolve all the differences we put between us. I agree. 'Strange Mutations' is a platform for all these different musical ideas to be presented side by side."

Performances are 8 tonight and tomorrow and 3 P.M. on Sunday. Tickets are \$7. Information: 255-5793.