

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music

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Pop: Reich In Review

By JOHN ROCKWELL

STEVE REICH is still thought of as one of the Young Turks of contemporary American music, so it was a little surprising to see that he was mounting a four-concert retrospective of his work, which began Monday night at the Kitchen.

But actually Mr. Reich has more than a decade of mature work behind him, and its evolution tells a lot about where his music has gone. One's only regret is that he has chosen not to include any of his tape pieces from the mid-1960's. His early phase pieces were what first attracted public attention to his music, and it would have been instructive to hear once again how his first music for live performers emerged out of that matrix.

As it was, the earliest piece Monday—and all four programs—was "Violin Phase" (1967). Two years ago Mr. Reich attempted to present this piece with four live violinists, but they were not able to maintain the necessary precision. This time the excellent Shem Guibbory went back to the way Paul Zukofsky originally played the piece. He made a three-track tape, with all three parts consisting of himself playing the same short phrase and gradually slipping out of phase, thus setting

up a complex, overlapping series of double and triple aural images. Then Mr. Guibbory, live, picked out successive patterns that emerged from the flux. He did this with great subtlety and technical precision, and the result was delightful.

The other two pieces before the intermission were "Clapping Music" (1972), which offers two musicians clapping an interlocking rhythmic pattern. It is Mr. Reich's purest exposition of his rhythmic principles, and hence simultaneously fascinating and a little didactic.

"Pendulum Music" (1968) is an instance of conceptual music, and a nice one. Four microphones are hung on cords above four upturned loudspeakers. The sound system is arranged such that as the microphones pass directly over the speakers, they elicit squealing feedback. Thus the piece begins with four giddily overlapping swoops of sound, and gradually shortens up and evens out to steady-state tones as the microphones come to rest—rather unfortunately—it perhaps mercifully—Mr. Reich cut the piece off before final stasis had been achieved.

PU Buller
After the intermission came Mr. Reich's most recent completed piece, the hourlong "Music for 18 Musicians," first heard in New York last year. This is an entirely new kind of Reich, a quasisymphonic study in richly layered planes of aural color. The lushness of sound, somehow both opulent and spare, and the lucid clarity of the ideas, achieved through recurrent textural material, result in a work that is both intellectually challenging and emotionally satisfying. The large crowd responded with a standing, rhythmically clapping ovation at the end.