

The Empty Chair:  
an interactive music video performance  
by  
G.E. Lewis

BERNARD MIXON  
actor, voice  
as  
a prisoner

DOUGLAS EWART  
actor, musician  
as  
a spirit

DON RITTER  
real-time, music-driven,  
computer-controlled animation  
(left video screen)

RAY EDGAR  
real-time, music-driven,  
computer-controlled image processing  
image processing  
(right video screen)

G.E. LEWIS  
real-time, music-driven,  
computer-controlled music performer  
(all loudspeakers)

STELLA VERVERIS  
DANIELA ZEHNDER  
camera performers

this version completed February, 1990  
G.E. Lewis, general direction

All performances dedicated to Stephen McCall IV

The Empty Chair is a performance work whose subject is the experience of incarceration. The performers and the listeners are invited to enter the mind of a composite "model" prisoner (not necessarily a "model ..."), where what we see and hear is a kind of living exploded diagram of this mind.

My own approach to the design, construction and operation of a performance work is aimed at immersing everyone present, performers and listeners, in an interactive environment optimized for contemplation. Multiple streams of consciousness are manifested through the juxtaposition of media and modes of imagery.

No one person, therefore, should expect to be able to "see everything", in part because the plethora of images and directions, irony piled upon irony, can seem a bit overwhelming, even to the performers. Frankly, I have no trouble at all with this multiplication of imagery. Our real-life experiences are certainly not spoon-fed to us; therefore I see no reason to provide "the official" road-map. As humans living in the world,

we have all proved ourselves more than capable of finding the way for ourselves.

Moreover, the improvisatory character of the piece demands that each runthrough of the work be unique. This does not mean, however, that the work lacks a character of its own. Rather, the working-out of the structures present in the work allow for many different possible performances--as if all of a sudden, we decide to take a different route to the ice-cream shop.

For me, a piece is very personal, and the interpersonal environment in which I perform and compose must feature trust as an outstanding component. Posed against this assertion is the seemingly contradictory notion that the relationship between computer programs and live performers is central to my work.

Once again, I feel privileged to be able to make a piece for a small group of uniquely gifted individuals whose lack of fear, and their insight into new areas of expression, have led them to actively explore and break the big and little tabus that seem to hold artists back. And as for the computer programs, it must be said that nonhumanity need not be equated with inhumanity. We'll need to remember this fact when the SETI eventually succeeds.

Special thanks to The Sonic Arts Union, New York City; Catherine Pavlov; Richard L. Teitelbaum; Maria Theresa Hanlon; David Weinstein; E.V.A. Industries, Ltd., New York and San Francisco; James Staley; Gordon Monahan; Phill Niblock; Muhal Richard Abrams; Mrs. Sybil Ewart; David Behrman; and many others.

Amiga computers for Don Ritter courtesy of Commodore Business Machines.

Fairlight Computer Video Instrument for Ray Edgar courtesy of Stichting STEIM, Amsterdam.

The creation of this work was made possible by a commission from the Music Program of The New York State Council on the Arts.

This performance was made possible by a grant from the Jazz Performance Program of The National Endowment for the Arts.

Finally, with the help of some very and diligent assistance of, and collusion between, the Kitchen Center and Roulette, we were able to pull it all together.