

S. E. M. Ensemble Offers Vocal Spark In Kitchen Concert

By **JOHN ROCKWELL**

The S.E.M. Ensemble of Buffalo—its director, Petr Kotik, once explained that the name doesn't really mean anything at all—opened a series of four avant-garde concerts Thursday night at the Kitchen, 59 Wooster Street, with a program of music by Julius Eastman, an ensemble member.

Mr. Eastman's most striking earlier work has been as an avant-garde vocal gymnast. The first two relatively short pieces on Thursday's program, "That Boy" (1973) and "Joy Boy" (1974), exploited his singing against mostly sustained or slow-moving instrumental parts, although only briefly at the end of "That Boy" did Mr. Eastman give a hint of his pyrotechnics. Both works were pleasant enough, but it was the final, hour-long piece on the program that seized one's attention.

The piece, entitled "Feminine" (1974), was a predominantly instrumental work (marimbaphone, piano, electric bass, four winds and—until they started conking out—four curious instruments that mechanically shook sleigh bells quickly back and forth.)

The structure was built around a steadily reiterated marimbaphone figure: three long E flats followed by four short, alternating E flats and F's. This central figure served both as a rhythmic point of reference, like the pulse in Terry Riley's "In C," and as a melodic germ out of which the remaining instruments evolved other notes and motifs.

"Feminine" might have benefited from more sharpness of execution although much of the playing was very good), and some of the textures sounded a bit too reminiscent of Philip Glass's more recent, more opulent work. But it was still most interesting and attractive.

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