

new sections of 'Map of 49's Dream of The Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery,' which in turn is part of a longer work called "The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys."

Theater of Eternal Music

The Theater of Eternal Music is whatever group Young and his wife, Marian Zazeela, have at the moment to play his music; this spring it consisted of the two of them plus Alex Dea singing, Jon Hassell on horn, David Rosenboom on viola, and De Fracia Evans handling slide projections. Young calls his installations Dream Houses because the entire ambience is controlled—dark, hypnotic, deliberately exotic—in order to evoke the suprarational state of dreaming. The first part of the subtitle indicates that there is a continuous sonic environment provided by sine-wave oscillators, emitting a 60-cycle drone that sounds somewhere between F and F sharp, plus a visual environment by Miss Zazeela consisting of vaguely Persian, ritualistic, dais-like columns with concealed lights in the tops casting a dull glow upwards and spiral-shaped mobiles suspended from the ceiling. Periodically the dim lighting is lowered to darkness and the Theater of Eternal Music gives an actual, hours-long performance in the space, accompanied by slide projections, overlapping and shifting in and out of focus, of symmetrical, highly detailed calligraphy by Miss Zazeela, again Persian in its feeling: the Ornamental Lightyears Tracery.

49's Dream might seem to be Young's own dream, but he says it was derived from seven times the number 7: 7 is both full of mystical significance and a key number in the overtone series—as if the number had been endowed with life through the power of music. The Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals refers to his decade-long preoccupation with the structure of sound. The phrase "time installation" suggests Young's absorption in the whole notion of time, and the "Eternal" and "Galactic" indicate the mystical nature of that absorption. "New sections" means that all the music Young makes now is subsumed into the work as a whole. The over-all title may also be an autobiographical allusion, but more importantly the im-

age of the tortoise evokes Young's fascination with slowed-down processes and the idea of a slow, purposeful and determined beast like the tortoise. Clearly means a lot to him (he and Miss Zazeela had a pet turtle once that they called 49). Young is a mytic, and a steadfastly private one at that. Perhaps the rarity of his public performances is due mostly to his difficulties in securing patronage, and perhaps he would eagerly fill up football stadiums with people to hear his music if he only had the chance. But more likely his reclusiveness answers a need for privacy and meditative self-improvement.

Young's historic place

One can look at all of this both historically and experientially. From an historical standpoint, this spring's environment represented yet another affirmation of Young's crucial yet underpublicized place in recent American music. Born in Idaho in 1935, he lived there and in Los Angeles and Utah before his family finally settled in Southern California during his teens. He attended three different Los Angeles colleges, receiving his B.A. in music from UCLA in 1958, followed by graduate work at Berkeley and a summer at Darmstadt with Stockhausen in 1959. Since 1960 he has lived in New York in a state of some austerity, with periodic trips for performances, mostly to Europe. In 1963 he married Miss Zazeela, and since 1970 both of them have studied Indian singing intensively with Pandit Pran Nath.

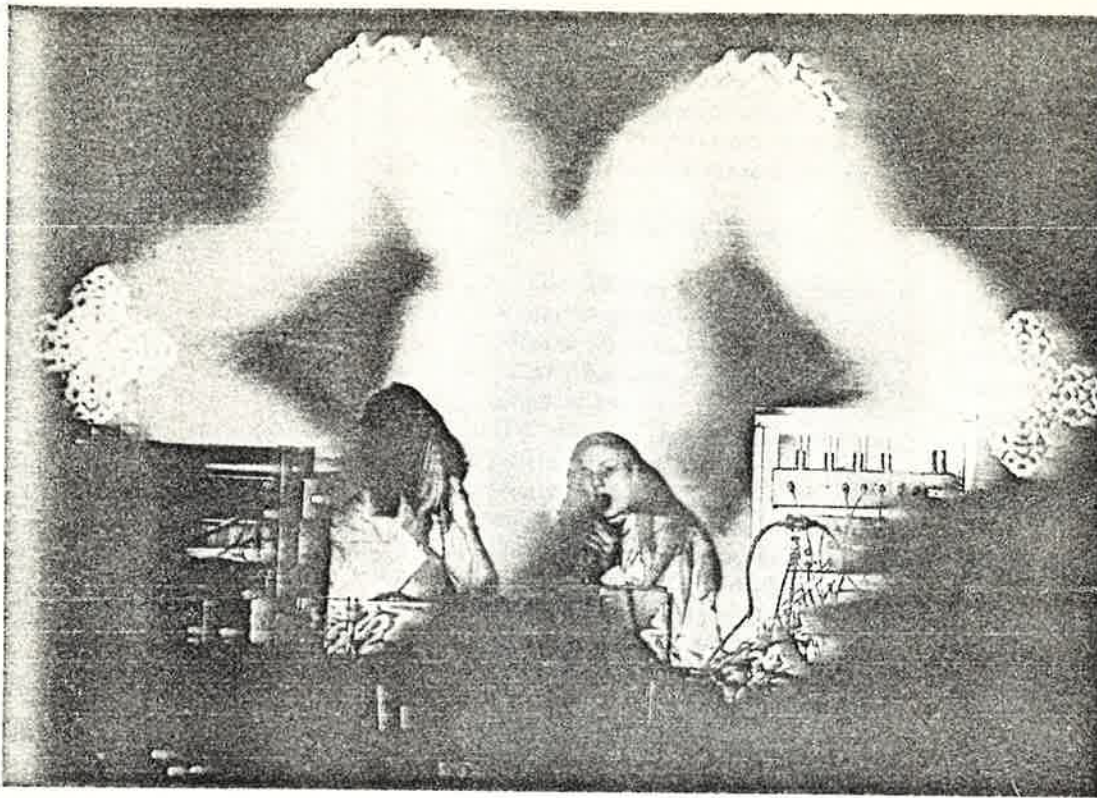
Young's early training in composition was in a Schönbergian serial method, with Leonard Stein, among others. But from his childhood he had been fascinated with sound as such—the hum of telephone wires, for instance—and quite soon he abandoned serialism for other forms of avant-gardism. There were wild, energetic saxophone improvisations, and sparse verbal scores that some people had trouble identifying as music at all.

Since 1964 Young's work has been with his Theater and falls under the general title of "The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys." The sources of that work are two and interrelated, and both have had an enormous impact on younger composers looking for new formal ideas in music after

what's new?

JOHN ROCKWELL

JUST TO LIST all the names that La Monte Young has appended to his music, and then to explain them, is a first step towards describing that music. Between April 28 and May 5 at the Kitchen in New York, Young presented a "Dream House" performed by the Theater of Eternal Music, subtitled "a time installation measured by a continuous frequency environment in sound and light with



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Young's Dream House: "a time installation measured by a continuous frequency environment . . ."

the salutary, throat-clearing anarchism of John Cage. On the one hand, Young is fascinated with the overtone structure of sound and the performance of music in just intonation: his intriguing theoretical speculations (the Selected Writings, obtainable through him at P.O. Box 190, Canal Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10013, are worth anybody's time) are full of mystical notions of the relation of time to both sound and color vibrations—Miss Zazeela's environment is as concerned with the relations of pure colors as Young's music is with pure sound.

Young can adduce an impressive list of acoustical theoreticians to lend resonance to his own investigations, but the principal school of such studies for him is South Indian, and of course it is Indian music in general that is the other major source for his music. Pran Nath is a North Indian artist, actually, of the Kirana school. But the meditative quiescence and exoticism that pervade most Indian music inform Young's work as well. Both Young's acoustical mysticism and his Orientalism have been echoed by an enormous number of younger composers, in New York and elsewhere. Naturally Young is hardly the only influence on such people.

But it would probably be safe to say that, although he is still under forty, his place as a father figure for today's avant garde is still second only to Cage's.

The reaction

All that said, there remains the experiential reaction and the question of the outsider as to what the music actually sounds like. It is a question that can't easily be answered through records, since none of Young's music has ever made its way onto a major label. There was a limited edition record—a few copies of which may still be available through Young—an early piece for amplified bowed gong and an early performance by the Theater of Eternal Music. And Shandar, the obscure French jazz label, is about to put out another, more recent example of the Theater's work (obtainable through The Open Mind, 66 Greene Street, New York, N.Y. 10012).

Underlying everything in the music is the drone, which is reinforced, either at the fundamental or shifting glacially through the overtones, by the voices, horn, and viola (in the Theater's current configuration). Above all this Young sings, in a voice

that has much improved in strength and versatility over the past couple of years of study with Pran Nath. What he does is mostly wordless vocalizing on the various overtones, but ornamented with flourishes directly characteristic of Indian vocal techniques. Some of us find these exotic little mordents and microtonal shakes foreign to the hypnotic austerity of the rest of the music, but Young likes them and is apparently determined to retain them.

Given the darkness of the space, the white-robed performers, seated in a circle on the floor amidst their electronic equipment, the glowingly hieratic aura of Miss Zazeela's slides, and the room-filling amplitude of the sound, the effect is strong and pervasive. Whether it is "successful" is, of course, something that depends far more on the listener than on Young. People who are still accustomed to linear development and climaxes of traditional Western music will find it hopelessly uneventful, a protracted exercise in mindlessness. But those at all susceptible to mystical experiences will feel the drone seep into their very bones, and the celestially shifting sound colors will light up their imaginations in a way that no other music can. △