

The Kitchen Center

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Music

Piece by David Tudor Opens Electronic Series at Kitchen

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Electronic music is such an unexplored world of sonic possibilities that composers are often tempted into sheer aural sensationalism — the mindless wallowing in spectacular effects without much concern for musical logic.

Some composers react against that temptation by imposing a rigorous structure onto the sounds. Sometimes that structure can make sense out of chaos; at other times, it seems merely superimposed.

On Thursday the Kitchen presented the first of three consecutive nights of a series called "Composers Inside Electronics." The best-known name in the group, David Tudor, had a piece called "Pulsers" and before the intermission there was a work by Linda Fisher entitled "Solo Synthesizer Music." Other composers scheduled to appear in the second and third evenings are John Driscoll, Phil Edelstein and Bill Viola.

Miss Fisher's and Mr. Tudor's pieces made for an interesting contrast. Miss Fisher's, which was performed live by the composer and Martin Kalve, was rigorously organized in a minimalist manner. It consisted of three six-minute segments in which successive sections re-used the materials of its predecessors. The effect was strikingly pretty in a manner reminiscent of Philip Glass, alternating patterns of quick, regular notes with curving sustained lines. But the formal procedures sounded just a little simplistic and arbitrary.

Mr. Tudor's piece may have a hidden structural logic, but it seemed far more improvisatory. Yet, ironically, the moment-by-moment impact was far more convincing; sometimes the best kind of logical coherence is that attained through sheer intuitive musicality.

"Pulsers" made use of several channels and a battery of electronic equipment that Mr. Tudor could modify, but not directly "play." The sounds consisted of stuttering, spark-like percussive bursts and more sonorous, quasi-melodic material, soem of it derived from an electronic-violin tape by Takehisa Kosugi. Nearly 70 minutes long and not continually gripping this was still a most impressive achievement—one in which a remarkable range of aural color was blended contrapuntally in a fascinating way.

Electronics, Not the Piano, Is David Tudor's Muse Today

By ALLEN HUGHES

Throughout the 1950's and into the '60's, David Tudor, a virtuoso of extraordinary keyboard and organizational facility, devoted himself to avant-garde music of the day and performed it with devotion and authority.

Whether cutting through the scary thickets of notes that make up Pierre Boulez's "Sonata No. 2," sitting serenely through the silence of John Cage's "4' 33" or whacking away at the case of a piano in some composer's planned attack on the instrument, Mr. Tudor was a model of poise and serene confidence in the rightness of it all. For more than a decade he was the keyboard hero of experimental composers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Doesn't Feel Guilty

All that has changed.

David Tudor is the headliner at the Kitchen in SoHo for three concerts beginning tonight, but the piano has nothing to do with it. The programs? "Live electronics in resonant space interactive with instruments and dance" is the way the Kitchen's publicity flyers describe them, and the 50-year-old Mr. Tudor agreed earlier this week that that was about right.

"One day I woke up and realized I wasn't going to play the piano any more, and I didn't feel guilty about it. I compose now, and when I conceive a work, the sound of the piano is not what attracts me, and so I don't compose for it. Electronics is a world of new sound imaginations and just as much a taskmaster as the piano."

Mr. Tudor does not work alone. He heads a group of eight, called "Composers Inside Electronics," that has appeared in Europe as well as in this country. Five of the eight will be appearing at the Kitchen.

Everyone a Musician

Although Mr. Tudor says that all eight, including himself, are electronic composers, he is pleased to point out that two of them are electronic designers and that one is a video man. In other words, conventional musical backgrounds are not de rigueur to Mr. Tudor's way of thinking. He wants to see "the common man become a musician—every man his own musician. It has to happen," Mr. Tudor states flatly, "and electronics is one way it is going to happen."

Most of the group's appearances in the three years of its existence have been in contemporary art museums, but there have been some in universities. Mr. Tudor's associations with artists in other fields go back many years. Indeed, his first acknowledged work as a composer was done for the painter Robert Rauschenberg, for presentation at the Stockholm Museum in



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David Tudor

"Every man his own musician"

1964. It was called "Fluorescent Sound."

"I was hesitant about it," Mr. Tudor says now, "and the first time I called myself a composer was in 1966 at the Nine Evenings for Theater and Engineering."

Quite a bit of Mr. Tudor's time is taken up by his work with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, with which he has long been associated. Actually, this occasionally calls for a bit of piano-playing, but it also involves composition, improvisation and work as audio man. Mr. Tudor tours with the company.

When not traveling, he works at his country home in Rockland County. "I have my own laboratory, and I build my own electronic components there," he said.

A native of Philadelphia, Mr. Tudor came to New York in the late 1940's after having had a youthful career as an organist. Here in New York he studied composition with Stefan Wolpe and piano with Irma Rademacher, who was married to Wolpe at that time.

"I've always had a facility for grasping very complex musical materials, and a digital facility," Mr. Tudor acknowledges, "but I had very good teachers, too. My dedication is really to sound and to music rather than to a particular instrument, but I might play the piano again one day. It's been on my mind to do some things other people should be doing."

Things by whom?

"Let's not name names," he said.