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Music: Aborted Recital

Palestine, Composer-Pianist, Breaks Off 'Continuum' Debut, Citing Distractions

Charlemagne Palestine, an avant-garde composer, had been scheduled to present the New York premiere of his four-hour "Spectral Continuum for Piano" Sunday night at the Kitchen, 59 Wooster Street. The premiere took place, but it didn't last four hours.

Mr. Palestine broke things off after only two and a half hours, complaining about the Steinway grand he was using. "The work was conceived for a Boesendorfer," he said afterwards. "The Boesendorfer is the best piano in the world. But I couldn't get one. This Steinway was stiff and toneless."

"Spectral Continuum" is a fragile, improvisatory affair that depends largely on the mood of the performer, so Mr. Palestine's disgruntlement—he was also upset by the contrast between New York and California, where the piece was conceived, by the noise from the street and

by some of the circumstances of the concert's organization—affected the piece during its playing as well as its over-all length.

The work consists of rapidly reiterated chords in the middle of the keyboard using both hands. The idea is to perceive, and then to reinforce the overtones the performer hears. Both performer and audience are meant to achieve a "somnambulistic state," in Mr. Palestine's words. Variety is induced by changes in the speed of the reiterations, the kinds of chords played and how they are arpeggiated, the rhythmic relation between the two hands, the dynamic level and the amount of sustaining pedal.

Despite Mr. Palestine's reservations, he did succeed in suggesting the intended hypnotic reverie, and one looks forward to a performance under circumstances more to his liking. JOHN ROCKWELL