

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO MUSIC
AND DANCE

New York Times

June 10, 1979

Music: Kitchen Offering Experimental Festival

By JOHN ROCKWELL

The Kitchen's New Music, New York festival of experimental music got under way Friday night with two identical benefit concerts. The program was an interesting one, full of good or at least stimulating music. But only some of it was new, and the composers selected, being well-known ones, didn't really constitute a preview of the evenings to come (the festival runs nightly through Saturday).

The first four were Steve Reich (represented by four members of his ensemble), Pauline Oliveros, Philip Glass and Meredith Monk. All these people work in idioms that are in some sense static or meditative. Of the four, the best effect was made by Miss Oliveros, who did an audience-participation piece that was lucidly simple in its instructions and lovely to hear and to participate in.

People were asked to sing long notes on a pitch of choice, and to alternate between that pitch and the matching of their voices to somebody else's pitch. The result was a shifting, dappled choral texture of sound, and the very timidity of many of the audience helped lend it a magically distant and ethereal quality.

The trouble with these benefit or festival potpourris is that composers whose work needs time or large ensembles aren't usually heard at their most characteristic. The first part of Mr. Reich's "Drumming," for instance, exemplifies his rhythmic interests, but it doesn't get into the coloristic variety of later sections of the same score.

Mr. Glass did a solo electric organ section of a forthcoming work, and while it had its merits, his solo pieces are to this taste usually less challenging than his ensemble works. And although Miss Monk's remarkable vocal

techniques and hieratic allure never failed to make an impact, her solo works from 1970 and 1973 don't suggest her more complex recent ensemble scores.

It was left to Robert Ashley at the end to provide the evening with a real climax, the only bit of old-fashioned avant-garde aggression of the night. Mr. Ashley performed his "Wolfman," which dates back to 1964 and succeeded in driving a good portion of the early-show audience from the premises.

"The Wolfman" consists of a cacophonous barrage of distorted electronic squawking on tape, fevered electric-keyboard effects and Mr. Ashley grimacing and moaning into a microphone, his sounds twisted by howling feedback. It was a little bit of nostalgic history, a blast from the avant-garde past, a new-music golden oldie, and, at least in retrospect, amusing as such.

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