

MARCLAY'S 'GHOST' *scratchin' the dickens outa art*

The fusion of metal and hip hop music, though common in pop culture is appearing in the most unsuspecting of places. Christian Marclay's Ghosts, performed at the Kitchen was a perfect example.

At the outset of the piece, one was greeted by a dark ominous room, illuminated by swirling white lights showcasing gilded columns. Marclay approached his station--seven turntables set up facing him, stacks of black vinyl to his right. He turned on the power, and put the records on the turntables. White noise marked the beginning of his first composition, Ruins (disc composition #42). Yet from the initial cacophony of seven grating styluses, Marclay sculpted provocative sounds with powerful authority.

His technical skills were as exciting as his music. There were times when he acted the part of a perfect DJ. Any master MC would respect the lightning speed of Marclay's hands. At other points, he allowed records to groove on certain bands, capturing the effect of ambient tape loops. Throughout the piece, he maintained an acute awareness for the mood of each musical landscape. Often by speeding or slowing down the records manually, he not only controlled the tempo, but exhibited a pronounced sense of rhythm as well. A simple tap of the thumb or a bit of scratching served to accent and structure his composition.

The discs themselves were gems--all 53 of them. African polyrhythms were interspersed with sound effect records, big band tunes and even regional music (a polka perhaps?). The themes wandered like a serial composition, but the effect was never tiring, even after approximately 25 minutes.

For the second piece, entitled Ghost (I Don't Live Today), the space remained darkened, but the set changed. A big video

screen was flanked by two amplifiers, dwarfing a smaller amp and turntable in the middle of the floor. Marclay reentered the room. A montage of images from Jimi Hendrix Plays Berkeley (1970) appeared on the video screen. Marclay walked to his instrument. The tall, lanky silhouette of his body was projected onto the psychedelic screen behind him. Marclay picked up the turntable and by means of a shoulder strap, positioned it vertically. The "hip" in the crowd snickered in amusement. No doubt this was to be a very special tribute to the legendary rock star.

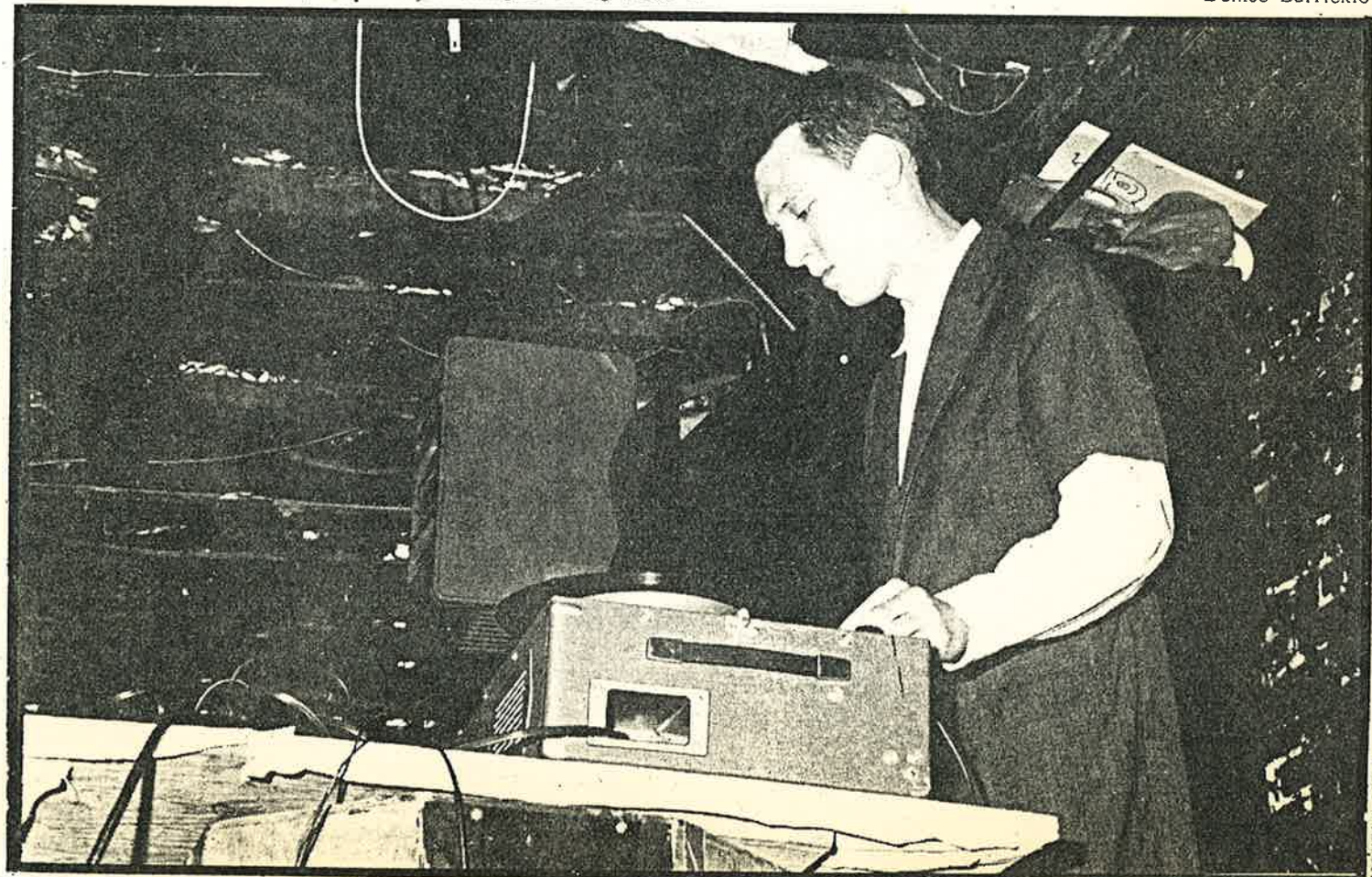
Watching Marclay mimic an electric guitar with a stylus was very jarring. One rarely witnesses such abusive handling of conventionally precious equipment. Yet the image of Marclay wrenching forth feedback from his strange instrument complimented Hendrix's frenzied riffing.

Though the power of Marclay's piece Ghost (I Don't Live Today) lies in the novelty of its approach, it should not be easily dismissed as superficial. Too many times popular culture is shunned by experimental musicians. As a result, creativity becomes stifled by high-brow elitism.

Marclay has a sense of humor about his work. His wit and broad cultural interests, from scratching to metal music, to even opera, reflects an important concern for widening audience appeal in an otherwise exclusive, academic medium.

Marclay has collaborated with musicians like Fred Frith, Arto Lindsay, Ikue Mori, Elliot Sharp and John Zorn. He is presently working on a opera, Dead Stories, that will be premiered in May at Just Above Midtown. His records are available on Rift and Zoar records.

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