

THE KITCHEN

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'Ghost Music' Concert

By ROBERT PALMER

THE program for Morton Subotnick's "Ghost Music" concerts, which were presented at the Kitchen on Friday and Saturday nights, managed to be dauntingly abstruse. One composition, "Liquid Strata," was described as "a response to Newton's insights about fundamental realities of nature," and it was asserted that the singing and playing of several live performers were being modified by "an electronic ghost score."

What one actually heard, at the Saturday night program at least, was positively prosaic by comparison. In "Life History," Joan La Barbara read a text on insect metamorphoses, Mr. Subotnick played a suitably insectlike series of clarinet figures, and a pre-programmed tape set various electronic alterations of both vocal and instrumental sounds in motion. In "The Last Dream of the Beast" Miss La Barbara sang and breathed and snored and the "ghost score" worked various transformations on the pitch, timbre and vibrato of her voice. "Liquid Strata" included some text but was mostly tape-modified piano, played with a great deal of energy and rhythmic drive by Ralph Grierson.

Two questions seem relevant when evaluating music of this sort. Is the original score interesting in itself? And do the electronic modifications make intrinsic musical sense? For the most part, this listener found himself answering no to both questions. "Life History" might have had a humorous or



Morton Subotnick

possibly a simply descriptive intent, but the musical material was thin and the amplification on Mr. Subotnick's clarinet drew undue attention to the mechanics of his rather labored playing. Too much of "The Last Dream of the Beast" sounded like a random sampling of avant-garde vocal clichés; one began to suspect that one of the piece's purposes was to make the performer appear ridiculous.

"Liquid Strata" was somewhat bombastic. But it did offer flashy timbral transformations. By far the most successful piece on the program was "A Sky of Cloudless Sulphur," a tape composition that made interesting use of interlocking rhythm patterns and spatial panning. But even here some of the more extreme electronic effects seemed wholly gratuitous in the context of the music's overall sense and rhythmic thrust.

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