

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO, MUSIC
AND DANCE

The New York Times

January 26, 1979

Music: Meredith Monk

MEREDITH MONK'S music concerts at the Kitchen, which began Wednesday night and continue through tomorrow night, are attracting big crowds. That's no doubt because of her dance reputation, but music lovers should find these concerts of great worth, as well. For in them Miss Monk is confirming that she has become one of the more fascinating experimental composers of the day.

The program amounts to a retrospective of her vocal music since 1971. As she explains in the program notes, that work started with her own singing, continued with her at first intuitive, then more systematic explorations of the possibilities suggested by her vocal experiments, and finally broadened out into vocal ensemble music. She had some classical training and sang folk music as a teen-ager. But basically this is music in the great American tradition of isolated, sometimes naive but wonderfully original art.

Miss Monk's basic method is to set up a gently rocking ostinato on a single instrument (piano, electric organ, cello) and then to sing over it. The principal tension is between the lulling repetition and unadorned simplicity of the instrumental part and the relative complexity of the vocal part. That complexity is obtained first of all by bizarre coloristic alterations of the "natural" vocal color. Or it's done, in the more recent pieces, through the sometimes dazzling if untutored use of counterpoint, or by the interjection of drama into what seems to be abstract music

Miss Monk's pieces are wordless, and their interest lies in structure and aural color. But sometimes (most effectively in "Tablet" from 1977), the sound suggests chattering gossip, or fervent rhetoric, or anguished wailing. As such it becomes as revelatory about humanity in general and women in particular as Miss Monk's theatrical spectacles.

Needless to say, this couldn't be effective without effective performances. Like so much of the better new music, composition and execution are almost inseparable here. Miss Monk's own voice is not only attractive and varied, but also her principal collaborators, Andrea Goodman and Monica Solem, both sing (and play, when necessary) adeptly and have strong, appealing personalities. Additional — and highly skilled — collaborators in the final piece were Julius Eastman, Robert Een and Paul Langland.

JOHN ROCKWELL

Board of
Directors

Robert Ashley
Paula Cooper
Suzanne Delehanty
Philip Glass
Barbara London
Mary MacArthur
Barbara Pine
Carlota Schoolman
Robert Stearns
John Stewart
Caroline Thorne
Paul Waller

-ALEAKALA, INC.
59 WOOSTER
NEW YORK,
NEW YORK
10012
(212) 925-3615