

press release

THE KITCHEN

video • music • dance • performance

Contact: Carlota
Schoolman,
925-3615
(Press screenings
by appointment)

PERFECT LIVES

\$5.00/3.50 members

An opera in 7 half-hour episodes written and created for television by Robert Ashley

Commissioned for television by The Kitchen
Produced by Robert Ashley and The Kitchen in association with Channel Four Television (Great Britain)

Realized in collaboration with:

"Blue" Gene Tyranny (music collaborator)
John Sanborn (director)
Peter Gordon (music producer)
Carlota Schoolman (television producer)

Paul Shorr (soundtrack producer)
Mary Ashley (design collaborator)
Jacqueline Humbert (costumes and make-up)
Mary Perillo (associate director/producer, font design)
Dean Winkler (video synthesis and video tape editor)

Starring:

Robert Ashley as "R"
"Blue" Gene Tyranny as Buddy (The World's Greatest Piano Player)
Jill Kroesen as Isolde
David Van Tieghem as "D" (The Captain of the Football Team)

The Kitchen is pleased to announce the completion of PERFECT LIVES, an opera in 7 half-hour episodes written and created for television by Robert Ashley. Commissioned for television by The Kitchen in 1978, PERFECT LIVES is a collaborative work designed by Ashley to present new music to the public through the medium of television. Written for three solo voices and solo piano synchronized with pre-recorded orchestral beds, PERFECT LIVES features the keyboard inventions of "Blue" Gene Tyranny and the singing of Jill Kroesen and David Van Tieghem in a visual treatment created by television innovator, John Sanborn.

At its center is the hypnotic voice of Robert Ashley. His continuous song narrates the events of the story and describes a 1980's update of the mythology of small town America. PERFECT LIVES is a labyrinth populated with myriad characters revolving around two musicians - "R", the singer of myth and legend, and his friend, Buddy, "The World's Greatest Piano Player". They have come to a small town in the Midwest to entertain at The Perfect Lives Lounge. As Robert Ashley describes in the opera synopsis, "they fall in with two locals to commit the perfect crime, a metaphor for something philosophical: in this case, to remove a sizable amount of money from The Bank for one day (and one day only) and let the 'whole world know that it was missing'." The eloping couple Gwyn and Ed, the old people at the home, the sheriff and his wife (Will and Ida) who finally unravel the mystery, and Isolde who watches the celebration of the changing of the light at sundown from the doorway of her mother's house are some of the characters who journey through the seven episodes

(over)

484 Broome Street (between West Broadway and Wooster) New York City
mail: 59 Wooster Street, New York, New York 10012. (212) 925-3615

PERFECT LIVES

page 2

of the opera. Derived from a colloquial idiom, PERFECT LIVES transforms familiar material into an elaborate metaphor for the rebirth of the human soul. It has been called a comic opera about reincarnation.

Robert Ashley is known as a pioneer in the development of music theater and large-scale collaborative performance forms.

"The collaborative aspect of the work follows principles I have used for many years in search of a new operatic style. The collaborators are given almost absolute freedom to develop characterizations from the textual and musical materials I provide. The musical and visual materials are coordinated through 'templates', a term I have come to use to describe the subjective assignment of emotional values and moods to visual forms and corresponding musical structures. Within the rules defined by the 'templates' the collaborators in all aspects of the work are free to interpret, 'improvise', invent and superimpose characteristics of their own artistic styles onto the texture of the work. In essence, the collaborators become 'characters' in the opera at a deeper level than the illusionistic characters who appear on stage."

- Robert Ashley -

PERFECT LIVES was developed musically through live performances in Europe and America. "Blue" Gene Tyranny was Ashley's first collaborator -- his keyboard melodies and harmonies define the character of Buddy. Tyranny and Ashley performed a chamber version of the piece many times together (including at The Kitchen in early 1978). Shortly after The Kitchen commissioned PERFECT LIVES as an opera for television, the live version expanded to include richly layered orchestral tapes produced by composer Peter Gordon, and the singing of Jill Kroesen and David Van Tieghem. In 1980, John Sanborn recorded the basic video tracks on location in Illinois according to the templates provided by Ashley's score. From this material, "The Lessons", a preview version of the opera (based on keyboard gestures by "Blue" Gene Tyranny) was produced through the TV Lab at WNET.

In the Fall of 1982, a pre-sale was obtained from Channel Four Television in Great Britain making possible the completion of PERFECT LIVES. John Sanborn, the television director, designed an elaborate shooting and editing plan for the visual elements of Ashley's score. The post-production was completed this August under the supervision of Dean Winkler at VCA Teletronics who worked with Sanborn on image processing and was the video-tape editor.

Two episodes from PERFECT LIVES will be featured this month at The American Film Institute's Video Festival (LA) and the Toronto Film Festival. Channel Four will present the U.K. broadcast premier to coincide with the completion of Peter Greenaway's documentary on Robert Ashley. During the development of the opera, record albums produced by Peter Gordon were released by Lovely Music Ltd. The complete soundtrack of PERFECT LIVES (produced in collaboration with Paul Shorr) will soon be available in an audio cassette edition.

PERFECT LIVES was produced with support from The National Endowment for the Arts (Media and Visual Arts), The New York State Council on the Arts (Media), The Rockefeller Foundation, The Ford Foundation, and The Beards Fund.