

Concert: Tom Hamilton

THE Kitchen, the avant-garde performance space at the corner of Broome and Wooster Streets in SoHo, began its fall concert season on Monday night. It's a season that should prove unusually interesting because it's the Kitchen's first with George Lewis as music director.

Mr. Lewis is a respected young composer in electronic and other media, a top-flight jazz musician and an important link between these two traditions. His appointment at the Kitchen could accelerate the blending of compositional and improvisational disciplines that's already been going on there for several years.

Monday's concert, "Formal and Informal Music" by the St. Louis-based electronic composer Tom Hamilton, found Mr. Hamilton modifying the speed and juxtaposition of various pre-recorded tape loops and interacting with an improvising soloist, the woodwind player J.D. Parran. On paper, it looked like the sort of program that could make the Kitchen's new season particularly important, but this listener found it disappointing.

Mr. Hamilton is adept at manipulating his tape loops to create a variety of

moods, but too many of the loops sound overly familiar — like second-hand Terry Riley or much worse, second-hand Morton Subotnick. And Mr. Parran, who has proved himself a resourceful improviser on numerous occasions, found a place for himself in or in opposition to the music only intermittently.

The music's failures were largely failures of vocabulary. Mr. Hamilton's program notes contended that Mr. Parran's "sound language" would derive in part "from the idiosyncratic shaping of events in the electronic music," but Mr. Parran kept falling back on overblown squawks and other avant-garde clichés in much the same way that Mr. Hamilton's tapes kept sounding like the work of earlier electronic composers.

Finding a vocabulary that's as fresh as the latest breakthroughs in electronic and computerized music systems and integrating improvisation into preconceived sound environments are two of the most critical problems facing contemporary composers. If Monday's concert did not provide satisfactory solutions to these problems, it at least grappled with them unflinchingly.

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