

COMPUTER MAKES DEBUT IN CONCERT

Other Members of Trio Are
Crosscut Saw and Organ

By THEODORE STRONGIN

Some sort of peak in long distance chamber music was reached last night in the Guggenheim Museum during the concert of the Sonic Arts Union.

The occasion was a work called "Conspiracy 8" by Gordon Mumma, one of the charter members of the union. There were three principal players and a narrator-conductor. David Behrman, another charter member, played a melodica piano 26, which is a tiny organ (it sounded like a reed organ), about an octave in range, which was activated by Mr. Behrman's blowing into a tube.

Mr. Mumma played that legendary old instrument, the crosscut saw, activating it with a bow.

The third player was a computer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. Steve Smoliar, the narrator-conductor, was connected to the computer by a keyboard and incoming and outgoing telephone lines.

Computer Sings at Work

Mr. Smoliar would type out questions to the computer (he repeated them casually out loud, while typing), the computer would answer, and Mr. Smoliar would read off the answer. The questions served as means to get the sound of the computer at work down into the auditorium through the phone system and over loudspeakers.

Meanwhile Mr. Mumma, in control of a huge collection of electronic equipment would modulate the computer's sound this way and that (all his manipulations were faithfully reported back to Cambridge by Mr. Smoliar, which produced varying responses from that end). Occasionally, the computer would have a solo, or all three players would play together, sometimes modulated, sometimes not.

It was fascinating fun, a little like listening in on the control room of a moonshot traveling not in space but in sound.

Speech Repeated Often

Also heard were Alvin Lucier's "I Am Sitting in a Room," in which a one-minute speech of Mr. Lucier's was repeated over and over, gradually increasing in electronic resonance until it blurred itself out. Meanwhile, a projected slide of an easy chair and a lamp in a corner of a room (design by Mary Lucier) kept changing and gradually blurring itself out.

All this was pleasant, restful and undemanding except as to length (25 minutes).

The final work was Mr. Behrman's "Sinescreen," strictly a musical event, no mixing of media. "Sinescreen" was what would happen if you went out into a field on a summer night, reached for a volume switch and turned all the crickets up gradually until they became deafening.

This was the second of two concerts on consecutive nights.

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