

OLIVEROS, Pauline

April 1980 (1)

Attachments to File

✓ Attached are the following citations and interviews submitted by Professor Oliveros:

"The Composers of Area Code 714, Part II: Composers of Academe", Louise Spizizen, Applause Magazine, October 1978.

"Music from 'Aleatory' to 'Zoo', The Nonpareils of Pauline Oliveros", P. Gregory Springer, The Advocate, February 22, 1979.

"An interview with UCSD's avant-garde composer Pauline Oliveros, All Sounds Are Music", Zenia Cleigh, San Diego Magazine, July 1979.

Pauline Oliveros

PAULINE OLIVEROS

THE COMPOSERS OF AREA CODE 714

PART II: COMPOSERS OF ACADEME

By Louise Spizzen

"San Diego is a cultural desert," warned my East Coast friends as I prepared to move here 10 years ago.

But how could that be? A quick scan of Eric Salzman's *Twentieth-Century Music* turned up almost a half-dozen important American composers working in San Diego. Although mature in their artistic careers, they were mostly a youngish (30's and 40's) group, far from thoughts or plans of retirement.

Why were they here? What was keeping them alive in the "desert?"

The history of music demonstrates that, for composers, the world has always been a desert. Music is not a cash crop. It may have been called "the food of love," but never "the staff of life."

Composers have earned their bread in the service of the Church, as conductors and performers in the homes of the aristocracy—many, even now, depend on the generosity of individual patrons. And, for centuries, composers have taught their craft and, indirectly, their inspiration to students.

In the early 1950's, a survey of the world's composers showed that, of all of them, only Igor Stravinsky was able to live entirely on earnings from his compositions, without teaching.

At that time, composers everywhere continued on the intensive exploration (begun before World War II) of electronics and other new musical paths, leading them into compositions which were unsuitable for performance by most professional orchestras—compositions which only a composer could love.

But music begins its existence as an auditory experience so, of course, these composers wanted to have their work performed. With professional orchestras out of the question for many reasons, composers turned to the next best source: the great numbers of preprofessional music students and faculty performers in the colleges and universities.

In an academic environment a composer could ideally expect sympathetic performances (free of cost) of his works, and he

could be assured of earning a living.

By the 60's, then, the composer's desert would have developed many oases, and San Diego is one of the most fertile. The institutions forming the wellsprings here are the University of San Diego, San Diego State University, and the University of California at San Diego.

Of the 10 composer-nomads here being considered, Robert Austin is the only one who grew up in this area. He earned his B.A. from San Diego State in 1943, majoring in voice. Composition was not being taught at State in those days, but Austin was already composing: his Alma Mater song is still being sung on the campus.

"My life has gone in phases," says Austin. "First I concentrated on performing (in New York, after college), then on teaching, and since 1970 it's composing."

Austin returned to San Diego in the late 60's, just in time to write a musical for the city's bi-centennial. His song "San Diego" has been recorded by Dick Braun's Harlequin Records, and Austin is understandably puzzled that the City Council periodically complains that the city has no official song.

At the University of San Diego, Austin directs the opera workshop and teaches voice. Although his compositions are always vocal and often theatrical, ("Stylistically," he says, "I'm something of a throwback."), he has never performed his own music with the USD singers.

Unlike Austin, his colleague Henry Kolar often composes for the particular use of USD campus groups. Dr. Kolar has been teaching music in San Diego longer than any other composer, having come to USD part-time in 1955. He has been full-time since 1970.

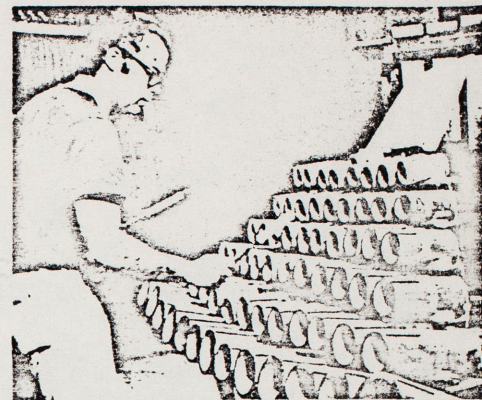
Kolar, as is true for many of the professor-composers, gets no "release time" from his institution for composition, rehearsal, or practice. (He is a violinist.) "I'm a midnight-oil composer," he says ruefully. Nevertheless, his output has been substantial, recognized by some important conductors and organiza-

tions. He has written a brass piece on commission for Young Audiences, and Robert Shaw conducted his *Memorialis* in 1958, commissioned by the San Diego Symphony in memory of Robert Kurka. (See last month's *Applause*.)

Kolar composes for all instruments and for voices, sometimes writing his own texts. He has composed in the serial technique: *Aphorisms* for strings, which was conducted by Daniel Lewis. But he considers his style to be conservative, "eclectic to Bartok and Prokofiev."

Despite the fact that USD has had a faculty composer since 1955, the school's first composition major will enter this fall. Kolar is looking forward to working with him.

When Austin attended SDSU in the 40's, there were only four faculty members in the



Danlee Mitchell of San Diego State University: a devoted disciple.

music department. Now the department has 400 music majors and a faculty of more than 50. However, only two are composers, and they are easily able to handle the four or five undergraduate composition majors and the two or three master's degree candidates on a one-to-one basis.

David Ward-Steinman came to San Diego State in 1961, one year before Merle Hogg. He has been composing since he was five or six years old, and, like many composers, he had a musical parent. His mother taught him piano and improvisation at home in Alexandria, Louisiana.

In his 42 years he has amassed a most impressive series of prizes, degrees, commissions, and performances. His publications are numerous, and he is an active performer as well as composer. He discounts the attention his work received while he was in high school as being "out of all proportion to its merit." But the reviews of recent works played by the Chicago Symphony, among others, testify that his music speaks eloquently to audiences, players, and critics.

He is currently interested in what he calls "fortified piano"; music using sounds generated for tape, synthesizer, and small ensembles; and has just completed an opera, *Tamar*, based on a poem by Robinson Jeffers.

Ward-Steinman has been active in shaping the music curriculum at SDSU, and finds the university "a good situation." I have lots of

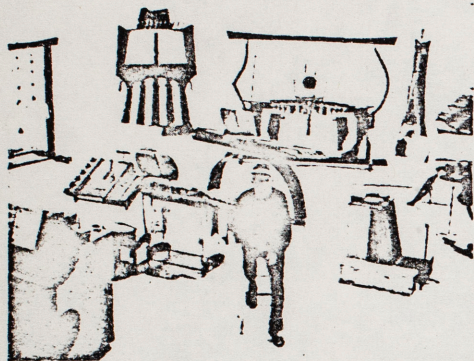
Applause October '78

freedom and autonomy," he says. "Freedom" doesn't mean "free time," however. "I do most of my composing," he explains, "during the summer, or on weekends and at night during the school year."

And he feels that the opportunities at State for performances of his works are poor. Except for Chuck Yates' wind ensemble or Jack Logan's brass groups, the school orchestras and choruses stick to a more conservative repertoire.

His colleague, Merle Hogg (pronounced Hoag), says, "I long for more free time for composing." Besides his professorship at State, Hogg is a trombonist with the San Diego Symphony.

With almost all his hours precommitted, it is not surprising that Hogg usually composes in response to a commission or a performance necessity. And there have been a lot of these,



The late Harry Partch with instruments he created: a vigorous ghost.

for Hogg is dedicated to teaching, and instructs not only in trombone but also tuba and euphonium, instruments which do not have enough literature.

Teaching pieces have been a great part of his output, but his idiomatic writing for brass has also brought him a commission from the Cleveland Orchestra. This was frustrating work, Hogg recalls. "They asked me to write five short pieces for brass which would be used between portions of a television broadcast about the orchestra. But when they did the broadcast, they only used one of my *Five Interludes for Symphonic Brass*. The other four spots were used for commercials."

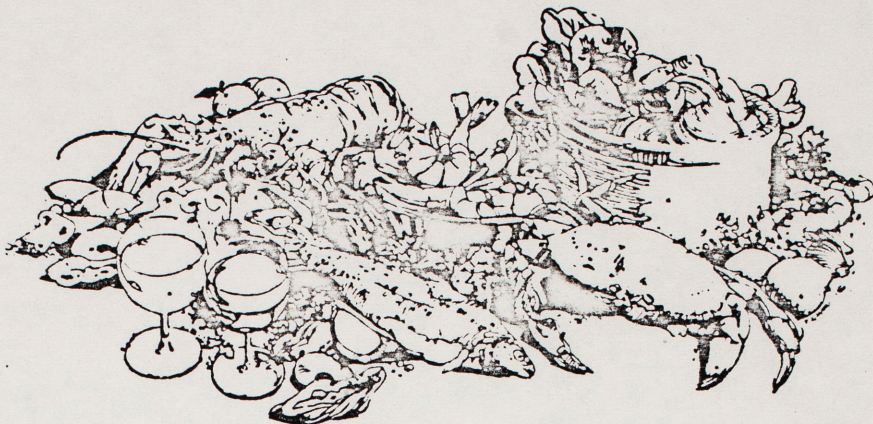
Both Hogg and Ward-Steinman studied in France with the venerable mentor to the world's composers, Nadia Boulanger. And both had significantly positive experiences with early musical training. Hogg grew up in a small Kansas town of 2000 which, remarkably, had three full-time school music teachers giving instruction in harmony as well as various instruments.

Ward-Steinman's musical mother was replicated in the lives of UCSD composers Robert Erickson and Pauline Oliveros.

Erickson learned piano from his mother and also studied flute and violin. "Every composer should be a performer," he feels. This is far from a superficial statement;

To Page 22

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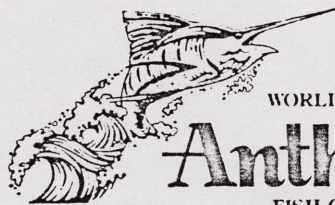
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Erickson's compositions reflect his continual investigation of all the sonic and technical possibilities of instruments. In his class on timbres at UCSD, one can have the dizzying experience of hearing and seeing a flute and doublebass being played, producing sounds so identical one cannot tell which instrument is making which sound. He has written a book on this subject, *Sound Structures in Music*.

When Erickson decides to write for an instrument which he does not play, he makes a collaborative effort with a performer, consulting as he composes. He is just now finishing a piece for harp (which he doesn't play) and small ensemble. "I have always avoided writing for harp," he confides. "It's like doing your income tax! I think it's a bad cop-out for



a composer to write something without understanding the instrument, and then say, 'Oh, well, let the performer work it out.' "

Erickson, who was already an important American composer before he came to the new UCSD campus in the late 60's, does get "release time" for composing from the university. But the student composers who work with him privately get many more hours than he is technically obliged to spend. "Still," says Erickson, "it (the university) is the only game in town—I like to teach."

Not only Pauline Oliveros' mother, but also her grandmother were pianists. Her mother is still actively teaching in Houston, and was recently named Teacher of the Year. As she grew up, Oliveros learned to play piano, violin, accordion, tuba, and French horn.

She didn't compose music early because she "was only hearing things." She found that composition teachers at the University of Houston were forcing her to "model after the 'Masters' instead of training the creative impulse."

She therefore left Houston, and struggled for many years to learn how to notate and

(Clockwise from top left) Bernard Rands, Robert Erickson, Pauline Oliveros, Wilbur Ogdon, and Roger Reynolds of UCSD.

structure the "things I was hearing." Oliveros met Robert Erickson in San Francisco in 1953, and studied with him for five years, supporting herself by copying music and playing accordion and horn. After a brief stint at Mills College, she came to the music department at UCSD in 1967.

Pauline Oliveros is known for her work with voices, exploring the many sound possibilities in nature and with electronic alteration. She is also deeply involved in meditation activities of all kinds. Her most recent compositions are elaborate ritual pieces which use theatrical as well as musical elements. These pieces defy notation and are therefore not in print. Oliveros therefore travels to oversee, direct and choreograph the many performances of these works.

She tries to balance her work life, but finds that "the institution (UCSD) draws a lot of energy from me—I must draw the line." But not at the expense of students who, she says, "must be given space and support."

Three other established composers are working at UCSD, and the presence of five such musicians, plus the doctoral program offered, makes that campus a center for new music, attracting 35-40 composition majors each year. Professional and student composers are also drawn by the performance opportunities afforded by three resident ensembles devoted to performing new works, and an upper-division course in new music performance.

Bernard Rands, a British-born composer who is now chairman of the music depart-

ment, is the founder and conductor of one of the ensembles, SONOR.

Rands had two musical parents: his father played piano and flute, and his mother sang. All his uncles, miners near their homes in Sheffield, played brass instruments, their wind miraculously unaffected by black lung disease. Young Bernard spent most of his out-of-school hours, from age 12 until he entered the University of Wales, as an uninvited listener at Sir John Barbirolli's rehearsals with the Halle Orchestra.

His career as a composer has been widely enhanced by his connections with academic life, and this is true for most of the composers under discussion. As many of his colleagues have done (most notably Ward-Steinman, Erickson, Oliveros, and Roger Reynolds), Rands has received fellowships from universities all over the world. These grants usually support a residency of a year or more, enabling the visiting composer to establish contact with local musicians. And often these contacts result in commissions for works to be performed in far-flung places for festival occasions or for the use of a particular per-

To Page 24



San Diego State's Merle Hogg (l) and David Ward-Steinman: students of Nadia Boulanger.

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Composers (from 22)

former. (Rand is currently completing a string quartet which will be premiered in London next spring, and is working on an opera in collaboration with Anthony Burgess of *A Clockwork Orange*. The unfinished opera has already had bids for performance from three parts of the world.)

Rands' works are so frequently played (upwards of 150 performances a year), that he might consider living on royalties and commissions, without a faculty post. "But," he says, "I like contact with other musicians and with new music."

Next year Rand will go on leave (the opera will be completed then) and Roger Reynolds will be chairman of the UCSD music department. Reynolds took a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering at the University of Michigan in 1957 before deciding he really wanted to be a musician. His many fellowships—Fulbright, Guggenheim, and Rockefeller—enabled him to study and work for four years in Europe and three in Japan. He also received a remarkable grant from the Institute of Current World Affairs. This award was open-ended, gave the recipient his choice of living wherever in the world he wished to work, and obliged him only to send a monthly newsletter reporting on his activities.

Reynolds joined the UCSD faculty in 1969, shortly after his return from Japan, and he established the Center for Musical Experiment on the campus in 1971. At that time, he was concerned with experimental vocal and instrumental techniques and tape sounds, and often used these resources in composing "theatre" pieces—pieces in which visual elements of all kinds are vital components of the work.

"Now, however," he says, "my instrumental works are more accessible. I'm asking players to do things they're accustomed to." Such will be the case with a commission he is finishing for Peter Serkin's Tashi ensemble, to be premiered at the Library of Congress in 1979.

Reynolds is also very interested in the spatial possibilities of quadraphonic tape as a medium he calls "VOICESPACE." Two major compositions are completed in this series, using texts by Coleridge and Beckett. "Computers," he says, "are the key to using space in the most controlled manner." And so he is trying to establish a computer system at UCSD since the nearest available one is at Stanford.

First chairman of music at UCSD was composer Wilbur Ogdon. He arrived in San Diego in 1966, after an eight-year tenure at the University of Illinois. Ogdon has been interested in new vocal and theatrical components of composition and is also completing an opera, *Sappho*, based on the novel by Lawrence Durrell. His theatre piece, *Tombeau de Jean Cocteau* reflects, in part, a Fulbright year in Paris.

Ogdon feels a very close kinship with his teachers, Ernest Krenek and Roger Sessions, and is a conscious descendant of Schoenberg

and Webern, in whose Vienna he is currently spending a sabbatical leave.

A very vigorous ghost—the spirit of Harry Partch—is last in our survey of composers in the universities. Until his death in 1974, Partch's whole life was a struggle for freedom from institutions of all kinds. He was mostly self-taught in music, formally educated only through high school. As a composer, he refused to teach, and floated briefly through many universities, content to stay if they supported his composition, always leaving when the inevitable request was made that he take on students.



Henry Kolar (top) and Robert Austin of USD.

His rejection of musical institutions led him to evolve his unique microtonal tuning system and to invent and build the fanciful instruments capable of playing his music.

Partch's devoted disciple is Danlee Mitchell, percussionist and associate professor at SDSU. Mitchell assisted Partch in preparing performances of his works and, as custodian of all the instruments and scores since Partch's death, he is involved in producing performances of this very theatrical music all over the country. San Diego Ballet will be presenting choreography to Partch's *Daphne of the Dunes* in May. Meanwhile, Mitchell is working to raise funds for maintenance and transport of the instruments; their physical presence on stage is always one of the delights of a Partch performance.

Clearly, the only thing "academic" about all these composers associated with institutions, is the institutions themselves. Most are considered to be in the avant-garde of music; few are allied with the more conservative 20th century trends. And although they teach in schools, these composers do not themselves form a particular "school" of composition.

They do have two qualities in common, qualities Bernard Rands looks for in his students. He says, "Composers need the ability to work hard. And then they must have an anger or a dream about what they want to do."

That, and a flask of water, will keep you alive in the desert. ☆



Music from 'Aleatory' to 'Zoo'

The Nonpareils of Pauline Oliveros

by P. Gregory Springer

FROM THE DIARY OF Pauline Oliveros: "June 19, 1973. On the road to Canada . . . Lin and I camped in the Canadian Rockies. We recorded a river for Anna Lockwood's river archive. It seemed to wash away all our years' troubles. Natural sound is healing sound, especially with the technological drones vanished to a very distant background. I guess there is nowhere left on earth that is free of technological noise."

Pauline Oliveros has collected sounds since she was 16, at which time she began to rebel against the formal studies in her Houston high school. She has since gone on to collect thoughts, meditations and ideas, and to put them into a formidable body of New Music. When we met (at the suggestion of a mutual acquaintance), I asked her the musical question regarding her frequent reliance on aleatory (chance) methods—of indeterminacy as it is called by contemporary composers.

"Chance isn't that loose," she affirms without hesitation. "Consider your own existence. Do you realize that you are the product of a chance combination of an egg and one of millions of sperm?"

At that point I was contemplating the rather symmetrical condition of my physical being as opposed to the chaotic state of my pre-planned questions, but Oliveros's incorporation of the immediate elements into her astute and lyrical philosophy soon drew tranquility to the next hour of our conversation. The music of the spheres seems to reside in the vicinity of Pauline Oliveros, awaiting her summons.

Oliveros has been called the "most recorded of all women composers." Her history traces through studies at the University of Houston to San Francisco, where she helped initiate Sonics (a center for concrete and electronic music), and she later was important in the beginnings of the San Francisco Tape Music Center at Mills College in Oakland. Her electronic compositions have been performed throughout the United States and Europe.

But beginning about 1970, Oliveros began to combine her electronic work with her interest in meditation practices, and a commissioned piece for Illinois Wesleyan University, "Meditation on the points of the Compass," utilized a large chorus and the audience as well to create a "mandala piece," marking the final phase of her association with electronic music.

From 1971 on, Oliveros has developed Sonic Meditations, music involving effects and sounds that are no longer available to her in

electronics. "It isn't that my interest in electronic music has diminished," she says, "But it is no longer a field whereby I can find new sounds that please or compel me."

Oliveros's house was constructed in the early part of the century and may have served as a monastery for a time. It is constructed entirely of redwood and surrounded by a garden. The home is a retreat for both her and an associate artist, Linda Montano, whose medium is video.

The University of California San Diego, where Pauline is an associate professor and director of the Center for Music Experiment, is splattered among pines and shrubbery on hills overlooking the surfers of the Pacific. Although we had made plans to meet on the campus, my chance meanderings to this destination led me through misgiven directions, belligerent bus drivers on the verge of a strike, a tour of the San Diego tattoo parlors and sailor hangouts, and the famous zoo, where hummingbirds whizzed through my hair and elephants trumpeted at tourists. Oliveros later commented on her interest in just such "zoo music."

I was standing by the side of the highway waiting for one of those tenuous buses. The schedule indicated that the wait would be more than half an hour anyway, so I took out the tape recorder from my shopping bag and plunked in one of Oliveros's composition/performances, "I of IV." It was still early morning (I always prepare for the inevitable cartographic misunderstandings in unknown terrain) and the sounds of the city traffic far overpowered that of the ocean. The tape began softly, inaudibly from the pocket recorder, humming, tinkling, whining and reduplicating tone in various stacks of sound. The effect was neither grating nor obtrusive but, on the contrary, complemented the city noise and rising heat of the day.

People passed, probably unaware that a riff of electronic music had just entered their subconscious. By the time the bus arrived, the mundane motions of city ritual had succumbed to Oliveros's electric chant. Routine had melted into the demands of a humanistically generated sound. I felt as if I had beaten the automated 9-to-5 at its own game.

Pauline assumes this power of sound. What is Tibetan chanting but just that, a key to the source of life's thrust? On a small knob of grass outside her university office, we began our discussion, curiously, with the topic of rock music. Oliveros had once delivered a lecture in San Francisco entitled, "Rock and Roll as Electronic Music," although she today admits to no knowledge of Eno or Kraftwerk.

"Maybe one of the most interesting things about rock 'n' roll is

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that people begin to have a sense of participation. It was hard to just listen to this music; you had to move. That made for an interesting change in audience relationships—not just going in and sitting down and being done to."

Where does the audience end? That's the question a passive consumer society must face, and one that Oliveros explores directly in her work. Her "Sonic Meditations" are subtitled "for Everybody."

"Also interesting is the idea of liberation movements," she continues, "where there is the demand for equality and interaction. I am very much involved in that, as you can tell from some of the things you might have read. What I've done in the last 10 years is more or less devoted to having all levels of participation. I've made works for people with no training, and I have work where highly skilled people and unskilled people can participate, but where no one even has to. In some cases, you don't have to have the passive relationship of sitting and listening, but can actively join in."

She has commented on listening as a new art. "Cultivated listeners are as hard to train as others. They are specialized musical pack rats."

Wedged in between the electronic beginnings and the meditative present, there lies a body of theatrical compositions. In 1977, her "Bonn Fier" composition was performed in Germany to the perplexity of most of the citizens of Bonn. Without a centralized core to the piece, some of it consisted in supplying fake moustaches to all the women of the city to wear. Children were encouraged to paint over the city's manholes. Spontaneous performance troupes appeared about town with bits of theatre. Oliveros, who remained unaware of the sites of these musical zaps, nevertheless always seemed to be within throwing distance whenever one would begin, to her own surprise. Ideally, she concluded, such a composition/performance should be allowed to last a year or longer, gradually allowing a celebratory notion to seep into the minds of the populace. That way, the world as music begins.

There is an element of mischief-ousness to all of this. On the most recent album featuring an Oliveros composition, "New Music for Electronic and Recorded Media" (Arch Records, 1750 Arch Street, Berkeley, CA 94709), there is a photo of a moustachioed male graduate student signed "Best Wishes, Pauline Oliveros, 1976!" She laughs when I question her about it.

"That is a part of an ongoing theatre piece called 'The Theatre of Substitution.' I get different people to be me for a certain amount of time. It relieves me from the burden of being myself." It also throws an unusual light upon the album at first glance. Because of the photo and the lack of any overt feminist announcement in the packaging, I had listened to (and enjoyed thoroughly) the album for several months as a compilation of modern electronic music before I realized that every piece had been composed by a woman. I felt ashamed when the discovery was made and a new sex-linked category could be foisted upon critical evaluation. Such a notion is certainly unnecessary to the album's listenability. It is just music. Rich music.

"Why haven't there been more women composers?" was the question posed by *High Fidelity* in February 1973, and the magazine *The ADVOCATE*, February 22, 1979

allowed two "authorities" to debate the issue. One of the two women argued that women lack the creative impulse, always have and always will; the other, a psychologist, blamed circumstance. Somewhere in that article, Oliveros's work was mentioned, but her own response came in *Numus West* later that same year when she published a piece entitled, "Why do men continue to ask stupid questions?"

"The Patchwork Girl of Oz, besides having golden ears, was also a spontaneous muse. Kizzle-Kazzle-Kore, the wolf is at the door. There's nothing to eat but a bone without meat, and a bill from the grocery store." A patchwork collection of anecdote, survey, interview and diary, the article was a composite piece of poetry and humor, a Zen master boot to the butts of her stale battling contemporaries.

"What is your favorite sound?" she has asked, and compiled the answers. Wind chimes, babies nursing, Swiss cowbells in the Alps, voices, birds, hmmm, the bathroom door, basketball swish and "that!" were some of the answers she got. "Grating, cracking and grinding," answered a poet. Her own favorite is "The memory of undifferentiated masses of sound before my auditory perception was highly developed."

In another published poll she asks: "What is the most silent period you have ever experienced?" Answers: "Anesthesia. Sodium pentothal from an operation . . . the sounds just dissolved." "The time when giving birth, the final push seems like it's taking hours." "An anechoic chamber in the Department of Speech Pathology. That was real silence, and I didn't like it." "Silence is not a matter of what one hears but what one communicates. I went without speaking for a week." Oliveros says, "For me, it has been the long moment before an accident or an embarrassment. The mind switches and there is no input. Another is daydreaming when all sensory input is shut down, unless, of course, it's a noisy daydream."

One of Oliveros's compositions, "To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe in Recognition of Their Desperation" (1970), was performed for the fifth Women's Music Festival at the University of Illinois last June. In it, an orchestra plays according to cues given by lighting. Sustained notes held by

unspecified instruments and voices change over a period of 25 to 50 minutes. Certain notes are written to predominate in certain segments, but much of the piece is created even as it is being played.

"My earliest work is very difficult to learn. The work that I've done since the Valerie Solanas/Marilyn Monroe piece technically is not very difficult, but it is difficult in the way people have to relate to each other. One of the things about the piece is that it has got to do with feminist ideals. All of the instrumentalists have equal roles. There is no hierarchy in it, and that's difficult for people to realize. Simply, it puts them in a different atmosphere than they are used to playing in, so they have to deal with the technical problem of ensemble rather than the technical problems of instruments. That is more interesting to me than whether or not someone can play a million notes a minute or whatever."

For a while, Oliveros made her own instruments. Whereas a friend of hers, the late Harry Partch, built instruments like the Chromelodeon, Surrogate Kithara and Bloboy because the music he wrote demanded sounds previously unheard, Oliveros went about making sound instruments in the same experimental method in which she composed. "I didn't go into instrument making like Harry did, but I was interested in it. I made a few instruments in the '60s, but I was more involved with found objects, things that I could use as instruments. I think that to make a good instrument demands a great deal of skill and know-how, and although you can fool around with it, unless you devote yourself to it, you're not likely to come up with anything very good. It is very hard to get a good sound, to make a good sound. In Harry's case, he had no choice. He had to do that in order to do what he wanted to do. I'm for composing instruments as well as composing music, because that's the way things have to change, but I myself didn't want to be drawn to instrument-making instead of making music." One of the instruments Oliveros did create was found in the junkyard, some bronze rods and telephone dial changers that were easy to clamp to beams of the piano, then bent, struck and sounded.

Two of the compositions on the aforementioned album are by Oli-

veros and her friend Anna Lockwood. Lockwood, who collects tapes of rivers and loans them out to friends (what would it be like to listen to the Nile some August night under a hot Arizona moon?), also has created a piano cemetery by sinking an ivory upright piano in a Texas clay-bottom lake. Lockwood has taught at Hunter College in New York City for the past five or six years by way of New Zealand and England, but on the album, her "World Rhythms" (1975) relays the environmental sounds of pulsars, earthquakes, volcanic activity, geysers, mud pools, rivers, peepers, fire, crows, a storm on a lake, waves lapping on a lake shore, and human breathing—through 10 channels, singly and in combination, with a gong accompanying. That sounds noisy, but it is just the opposite, creating technological distance. When I played it for a friend (without her knowledge), it took her several minutes to ask with astonishment, "Where did that music come from?"

Oliveros's "Bye Bye Butterfly," done in 1965, concerns more her electronic tape performances than her recent meditation work. Improvised in composition, the piece "symbolically bids farewell not only to the music of the 19th century but also to the system of polite morality of that age and its attendant institutionalized oppression of the female sex." The title refers to *Madame Butterfly*, an opera on hand at the time of the studio recording and which was incorporated into the final sound mix.

"Women were excluded in the past because composing is telling others what to do," Oliveros has said. Nevertheless, as Oliveros concluded our brief but enlightening talk in the San Diego sunshine, it seemed to me that much of the strength of her, Lockwood's, and others' work grows from attuned receptivity to the rhythms around them. A strange vacuum device pushed by the university's lawn custodian noisily interrupted my attempt to ask Oliveros about local performances. "There's quite a performance going on here right now," she said. The *New York Times'* music critic, after viewing a performance of the meditation piece, "Rose Mountain," wrote, "There is a point at which music, consciousness, sound and religion are One. Pauline Oliveros seems to have found it." ●

"Women were excluded in the past because composing is telling others what to do."



Illustration/ Jeff Hoke

An interview with UCSD's avant-garde
composer Pauline Oliveros

All Sounds Are Music

"... It is the capacity to appreciate
and integrate into her music all the sounds of life
which sets Oliveros apart and gives
her work its universality ..."

by Zenia Cleigh

This is the second of a series on members of the UCSD faculty, who, although relatively unknown in San Diego, possess national reputations as authoritative and talented proponents of the avant-garde. Composer Pauline Oliveros is considered one of the leaders in the field of modern experimental music, still somewhat controversial, but very much admired for her powerful musical "ceremonies," which have broken through to new levels of interaction possible between audience and musicians, explored the roots of sound itself and stretched the definition of what music is to the mysterious realm of altered perception.

The Introduction

Pauline Oliveros, distinguished modern composer on the UCSD faculty, had expressed a wish to conduct the interview outside, and so, dressed in blue jeans, an ivy-league shirt and a black rose-printed vest, she was sitting in the sun on a little grassy hill near the university's Mandeville Center.

Composer of at least 100 avant-garde works of music designed to change the way people listen, it was not surprising to observe Pauline appreciating the musical potential of a little red lawnmower which blasted unbecomingly into sound nearby. "It's making a

ceremony for us," she said, as the operator began to weave circles with the machine around an adjacent grassy knoll.

It is this capacity to appreciate and integrate into her music the sounds of life which both sets Oliveros apart from other composers, and gives her work its universality. She belongs to that genre of neo-shamans who strike such a persistent chord in the contemporary avant-garde, artists who are not content to stay within established limits of their craft—letting the work simply be what it is—but instead insist on using their creations as magnets for drawing people into processes of personal growth.

Oliveros is a mistress of the secular ceremony, in which visual, theatrical and musical elements all take equal weight, and long, slow, meditative feelings in sound predominate. Leave your desire to be passively entertained behind when you attend an Oliveros concert. (She is giving a performance of "Some Meditations," July 6 at 7:30 pm at The Michael Stamm Gallery in Hillcrest.) Her aim is not necessarily to delight, but to involve you. Forget about themes, expositions, recapitulations and other western musical concepts. A stereotype breaker, Oliveros' goal is to present new sound which could both alter your attention process and instruct you.

Pauline is a bit like a tribal magician, calling the various elements of life together for a ceremonial restructuring. She reminds one of an Indian wise woman, walking softly on the earth with a reverence for all things.

The first thing one notices about Oliveros is her beautiful low voice, full of music, and her sense of composure. She listens carefully, watches attentively, speaks thoughtfully, moves fluidly. Her awareness seems vastly open to all people and her mind will register the faintest whistle from a passing student, or calm itself to absorb noise from a passing jet. ("Don't try to block out jet noise. It just makes you tense.")

When the seven avant-garde contributors to the New York-based New Wilderness Foundation Printed Editions catalog were asked to submit a photo strip taken in a dime store machine for the publication, Oliveros, tellingly, was the only one who presented the same face in all four frames. "I try to present myself directly," she says. "I'm not trying to express a passing mood, but whatever I am—trying to let that come through. I don't see any reason to manipulate myself for the machine or anything else. The glasses I'm wearing I've had for 14 years. I just had my eyes checked and I'm getting new reading and distance glasses and I'm going to use the same frames. Also, if I see a piece



MORGAN SHANNON

“...I’m not interested in that type of music which aims to entertain the aristocracy. I’m interested in music which sets processes in motion for spiritual connections between people...”

of clothing I like, I’ll usually buy three of the same thing. You could say I’m rather conservative.”

Oliveros fasts every Monday for health; sometimes only has juice for lunch. She is vice-president and treasurer of the Institute for the Study of Awareness in Solana Beach, and has done research with the organization’s president, Dr. Lester Ingber, for seven years on the process of attention. She also has won a brown belt in Shotokan-style karate and just failed the test for the black. She does karate and yoga for 45 minutes every morning, and was instrumental in bringing the Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Kagyüpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhist teachers, to UCSD in March 1977, an indication of her

interest in world cultures and expanded forms of awareness.

Born in Houston, Texas, on May 30, 1932, Oliveros knew she wanted to be a composer at the age of 16 when she “started hearing things.” She studied at the University of Houston, later graduated from San Francisco State in 1957, and became director of the Mills College Tape Center in Oakland. Oliveros moved to UCSD 12 years ago where she now heads the Center for Music Experiment, and has impressed her peers with the ability to continue to innovate and grow.

She is the internationally recognized recipient of numerous awards and commissions and at least three times a quarter leaves

UCSD where she is a full professor to perform or lecture in major American cities. She calls herself a “fool” professor since she only has an A.B. in music, and stopped work on a master’s degree when it interfered with her composition.

Oliveros was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship for composition in 1973-74 among other honors, and took first prize for “Stadtmusik” in the city of Bonn’s 1977 Beethoven Festival for her piece entitled “Bonn Fire.” The work was updated from a composition called “Link” she originally composed in 1971 for Palomar College, and fit neatly into the competition guidelines: use of outdoor spaces in the city, use of various

continued on page 222

Oliveros

continued from page 191

musical performing groups, street painting, theatrical action, and electronic equipment.

"Actually, I was making a giant collage using prefabricated materials like barbershop quartets," Oliveros said, "or an ordinary musical, dance or dramatic group of any kind. But what I was doing was shifting them out of context so they were performing in places that were unusual and unexpected. I was interested in a casual audience, a chance audience, an audience that just happened to be there, so there was always a process of discovery, so people just happened to be there and saw something and noticed it was unusual.

"In 'Link' at Palomar I had a barbershop quartet show up in the men's room, sing and then leave. In 'Bonn Fire,' dance groups began their performances seated at one of the outdoor cafes in the city, all sitting at different tables as ordinary customers. They ordered a coffee or whatever and performed their movements very consciously and slowly, raising their cups to their lips and taking two minutes to do it, then making a conscious transition to slow dance, getting up from the table so that slowly the cafe was transformed into a dance drama. This was designed to happen to ordinary people, and

one of them turned out to be me. I just happened to be there at the time of that particular performance, but I never knew where anything was going to take place."

"Bonn Fire" also involved such activities as selling fake mustaches to women only and giving them away for free if the women would don the disguises on the spot. Senior citizens were placed in store windows painting pictures ("The Germans, you know, that drives them crazy to see something at all different"), and one group of musicians rehearsed a piece and gave a silent concert, which looked as though they were playing, although no music emerged.

"The point," Oliveros said, "was to alter perception. Usually you go about your business in the city, but there are always very strange and interesting things happening all around you. We try to pick up on them on the obvious level, sometimes on the subliminal level, and I was trying to play on that."

All of this demonstrates Oliveros' main theme: "Listen to everything all the time. Look at everything all the time. Be aware of as much as possible, and educate others to that possibility."

Oliveros' latest work, "*El Relicario de los Animales*," performed in May at UCSD, contained other examples of her penchant for blurring roles, disorienting audiences, breaking stereotypes, using natural sounds, and still managing to come up with passionately alive, sometimes very harmonious music with a deep element of human interaction which eludes the over-cerebralization of many avant-garde musical contemporaries.

In this work the musicians, seated in a mandala formation, entered one by one and began playing interpretations of a tiger's noises the minute they sat down. A violin shrieked into a jagged cry, a flute took up the call and a trumpet responded in turn as did the other instruments—clarinet, saxophone, cello, trombone, percussion, bass—while soprano Carol Plantamura turned slowly on a heap of red dirt in the center of the musicians and sang the word earth in four different languages. The French word "terre" was for the tiger evocation; the German "erde" for the owl; the Cherokee word "ehlohi" for the wolf; and the Spanish "tierra" for the parrot. At one point in the jungle of calls the percussionists calmly began to rustle large palm fronds which lay beside their seats when the performance began. The effect was compelling and outrageous.

Confronted with the apparent absurdity of using a palm frond as a musical instrument, Oliveros just laughs. After all, a palm tree shakes its fronds outside her Leucadia house all day. Everything *is* music after all. And she has been known to say: "You've always got to have a few people around rocking the boat."

Let her speak for herself:

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The Interview

San Diego Magazine: Among your better known works locally are the 36 "Sonic Meditations." What do you mean by meditations?

Oliveros: I began work with long, slow feelings in sounds and about 1970 I started calling it "Sonic Meditations." At the time I was not connected with formal meditation. I just meant "to stay with something." Eventually I became aware there were other forms of meditation as the gurus began to arrive in the West. My work has no conscious relationship to these other than that they were occurring, but I try to stay in meditation as much as possible. For me that means to stay in touch with what I'm hearing, both in my imagination and with the data that's coming in. To just be aware of as much as possible. I don't say I succeed, but that's my intention.

In 1958, a significant event occurred which changed my perception and I've been doing a meditation ever since. I put a microphone in my window and recorded the environment and played it back. What I discovered was that I wasn't really listening to what the recorder was. So I said to myself, "Listen to everything all the time." And I've been trying to do that ever since.

SDM: How did the meditations come to you?

Oliveros: The Sonic Meditations came from

an inner need. If you think about the '60s for a while, the Vietnam War was on, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, the students were in the activist mood. A student here had burned himself to death in Revelle Plaza in protest. I felt a need to do work to help me cope with this atmosphere—a refuge. Also, I found it began to give me insight into human relationships, communicating. Not performing to be on display or be admired, which is a narrow form of communication, but to make sounds so you connect with someone else and share the energy.

SDM: Critic Thomas Putnam of the Buffalo Courier-Express has said that you are a "great leveler in an age of musical specialization" and a "musical spiritualist." Another writer, Craig Palmer, in an article for Coast FM and Fine Arts called you "a people's composer, not a king's." What do all these epithets mean?

Oliveros: I'm not interested in that type of music which aims to entertain the aristocracy. I'm interested in music which sets processes in motion for spiritual connections between people, interactions.

Just look at a conventional concert hall today with the people in tuxedos, long gowns, the whole atmosphere carried forth from the times of Mozart and Haydn. There is that attitude of an elite performance taking place. I'm not comfortable in that atmo-

sphere. You can tell that by looking at me, it's not my world. They don't play anything new, for one thing. Some people enjoy it, I'm sure. I don't want my view to sound like there's another kind of elitism going on. I want people to come as they are to my performances. I want it to be comfortable. I want it to be an atmosphere of communication where people are turned towards each other and not an object. But I want to say this: I don't see my music as a replacement for other music. I see my music as part of the picture.

SDM: What do you mean, "spiritual connections between people?"

Oliveros: Awareness of others, and respect.

SDM: What is music, and what should it do?

Oliveros: You can get a technical definition: Music is organized sound in relation to organized attention. Philosophically, I think music should tune the soul, not merely entertain. And I might add that in the tuning process it might fail as an object of admiration which is a risk I'm willing to take.

SDM: What do you mean by "tune the soul?"

Oliveros: The Sufis claim that the soul is music, that the only way the gods could get the soul into the body was to play music and lure it in that way. I don't want to say things that sound stupid, but traditionally music has been used as a bridge between human beings and the supernatural, the gods or whatever. It

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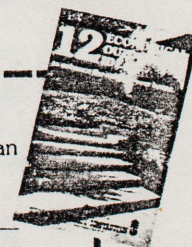
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seems natural that if it is possible to tune the soul to spiritual vibrations, then music is the way to do it.

SDM: Spiritual vibrations?

Oliveros: I think everything is living and vibrating, and we can't perceive it all. Our five senses are too limited and it wouldn't necessarily be desirable. But one can develop a flexibility with different awarenesses, useful for both daily functioning and spiritual receptivity. I don't like the idea of hierarchy, implying that there is something better. It's just that there's more.

Historically, one of the sources for this idea comes from Boethius, a Roman theorist who lived in the Justinian Empire between 490-524 A.D. In Ruth Halle Rowen's book, *Music Through Sources and Documents*, Boethius discusses three kinds of music: the music of the spheres (the sound heavenly bodies make in their orbits), human music (uniting the soul with the rational parts of the person), and music which comes from instruments. The first two types of music involve vibrations which can't be sensed with the human ear. They are above or below the range of hearing.

SDM: So your music wants to sharpen people's awareness to a level of spiritual receptivity?

Oliveros: It wants to. I don't want to make any claims.

SDM: The Hindu scriptures talk about God

as being perceivable as the universal sound "Om," an all pervasive energy field, and they chant "Om" and other mantras to raise their level of consciousness to where they can have an experience of God. You seem to be much more interested in the vibratory experience, shall we say, than in any dogmatization of what God is.

Oliveros: I want to create something that can be experienced and then you walk away without becoming a devotee.

SDM: What is God to you?

Oliveros: All of them. The primary spirit, the source from which all things come. I don't want anything to sound as though I'm some kind of high priest who has a truth that other people don't have. That's against my philosophy.

SDM: You use ritualistic forms in your compositions, which make me feel I have just been through some kind of special ceremony. Could you discuss your use of ritual?

Oliveros: There are a lot of definitions of ritual. In my case it has to do with state of mind and state of attention. Ritual means there is symbolic action. Ritual is to involve people, but also to carry symbolic messages, not just as sound itself. For example, a mandala is the symbol of integration. It has that meaning universally. So when I seat performers that way—the simplest form being in a circle, but there are variations—they are making that statement for integration.

SDM: Integration of what?

Oliveros: The mandala represents the symbolic side of human thought, a side that has been neglected and suppressed, and I'm trying to bring it back into balance with our linear thought processes, not to overcome, but to balance, because we want our full human potential.

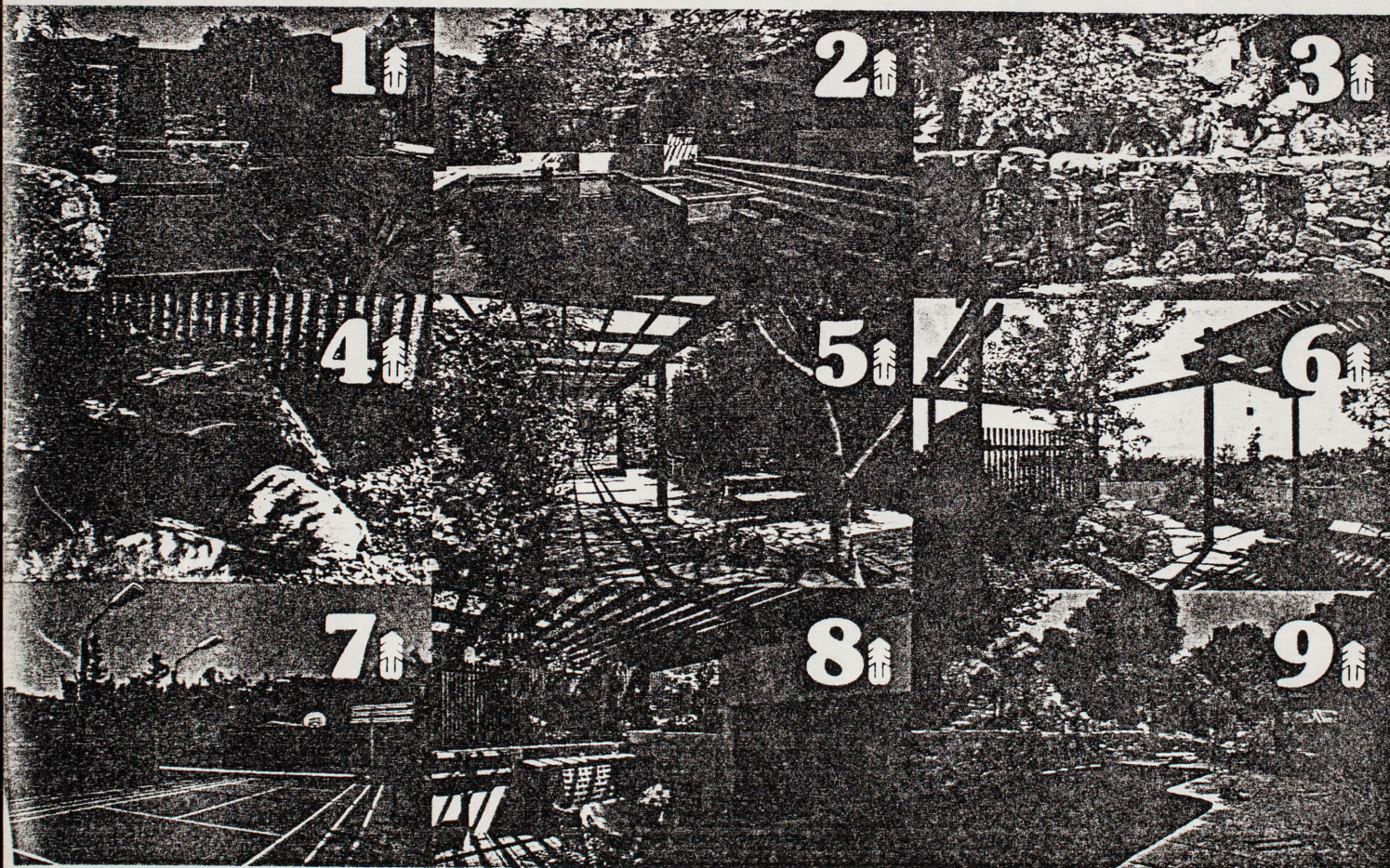
SDM: So this use of ceremony is a reaction to the modern world which lacks communal events in which people can participate together meaningfully?

Oliveros: Going to work or going out to eat can be a ceremony, but part of the problem of our society is the non-consciousness of actions, the possession of conflicting interests.

(At this instant, a black crow flies up to a perch on the top of Mandeville Center.)

Oliveros: There goes my crow. There are two who live on top of Muir College. It's one of my totems. The crow is a lively, intelligent creature—the only one who has managed to live with man and not be destroyed. It likes shiny objects and I'm always finding pennies, dimes and nickels, even in the streets of New York City. The crow is kind of a herald. I see it at interesting times.

SDM: The cultural historian William Irwin Thompson has written about the bankruptcy of modern art as a reflection of what he calls the Age of Chaos. Thompson predicts that this will decay into what he calls the "new



music of the Age of Gods," which is "not a horizontal progression of harmonies, but a vertical space of timbre" where sound becomes "a mandala, a hieroglyph." He also says: "Most artists do not like this talk of gods for they have grown up on a fashionable cynicism which makes their own egos the most important part of the universe." Your music emphasizes meditative states, connecting themes, unity of experience. Would you say your work represents this "Age of Gods?"

Oliveros: I'm trying to enter into a collaboration with people. In the meditations, the instruments are simple, but the process is not. It's as difficult as playing a virtuoso piece, but yet it has a simplicity, an immediacy, so you can begin. But also what it does is to make music accessible to people who thought it wasn't. The Age of Chaos Thompson talks about is concerned with selling a product, which may be the music or the personality. The other is more concerned with the process. My attitude towards consumerism is that we're living in a house of cards. The results are beginning to come in. The energy crisis, gas shortage, nuclear plant incident, people injured in industrial accidents, all in the name of consumerism and greed. We live with a certain kind of convenience but we pay very dearly for it in terms of life and health and peacefulness. My music is poor people's music. All it re-

quires in many cases is just the people—nothing more—the desire on the part of the people to share something together.

SDM: Your work is representative of what they call the "interdisciplinary" approach to art which is so popular here and in New York, the merging of forms in one work. Isn't it uncomfortable to step outside of your field of expertise, to risk failure?

Oliveros: I give myself that permission. I have to have it. I include visual elements in my work, but I haven't been trained as an artist. I include physical movements, and I haven't been trained as a dancer. But I take that chance. When you do something outside your discipline it is criticized as being naive, but then it turns out to be not so naive after all. Boundaries are crossed and re-crossed. The point is simply to overcome the fear of being an amateur—to give up expertise in order to get experience.

SDM: Two hundred years after Mozart's death, he is still a favorite at most symphonies. Will it be another 200 years until people are listening *en masse* to your work?

Oliveros: It takes time to build understanding of music. I dare say if you were an Australian aborigine who had practiced music since you were a child and you were confronted with a Mozart symphony, you would find it chaotic and vice versa. Music operates at deep levels. If you have learned to listen to Mozart it means you have had experience

which makes it understandable to you. A lot of it is not organized attention on a conscious level, but it is familiar to you and predictable. So, suddenly you hear a new piece in an idiom that's removed from that style and you don't have the connections in your psyche for it, and you have to open yourself to a new state. How do you do it? You just have to let it be and let yourself be so you can eventually use your analytical powers to figure out what's going on.

I really think the most important part of my work is to influence listening. In my own life, every time I compose a piece, it has to change me. My new piece, "*El Relicario de los Animales*," is based on calling. Somehow I'm beginning to hear the calls of animals in a new way. It's sharpened my awareness.

SDM: Chance plays an important part in your work doesn't it?

Oliveros: That's the most natural part of life. That's where we all come from. There are 300-500 million sperm released to meet each egg, and only 300-400 eggs are released in a woman's fertile period out of the 400,000 the ovaries contain, and I resulted from that. I have a question: Those sperm who were swimming towards the egg that was me—were they in competition or were they collaborating?

SDM: Who do you admire?

Oliveros: Them. (She gestures towards the

passing students.) I was just watching the people go by as you were saying that.

The Performance

It is the evening of March 6, 1975. Pauline Oliveros is giving a performance of her new work, "Crow Two," composed for the opening of Mandeville Center at UCSD. The audience files into the hall filled with simulated moonlight.

In the center of the performing area sits a 70-year-old white-haired poetess, and at four points of the compass forming a human mandala, four other women face her, two with white hair, two with black. These are the Crow Mothers. Revolving around the Crow Poetess are the Mirror Meditators, two people who face each other and mirror each other's movements, but must allow whatever movement occurs to be involuntary. This idea of totally spontaneous action is central to the musical form.

The most powerful force are the seven drummers who must each perform basic single stroke rolls with alternating hands. This is not a difficult technique, but what makes it interesting is that the drummer must first imagine the roll, the rate, the quality of sound and its intensity and then—as Oliveros describes it, wait until his body performs it. "The drummer initiates the action mentally, not physically," she says, "and the point is to keep the mental and the physical matching

each other. Each drummer is independent, so it makes a beautiful texture of beats which wax and wane according to biological rhythms."

On the outside of the circle are four players of the *didjeridoo*, an Australian eucalyptus branch buzz lip drone instrument. Finally, up in the ceiling of Mandeville Center on the catwalks are seven flute players entrusted with "telepathic improvisation." "The performers have to mentally hear a pitch and when they hear it, they have to make a decision," Oliveros explains. "The decision is: 'Am I sending or am I receiving?' If the answer is receiving, they play the tone, and if the answer is sending, they wait to see if they hear the note coming from another performer, meaning that somebody got the message and is playing it back.

"The audience is invited to participate in this by trying to influence the flute players. They can imagine a pitch to see if the flute players will play it—or start it or stop it. This is a private activity, so nobody knows whether people in the audience are really communicating with the flute players or not, but it's possible." Oliveros goes on: "Now, meditators are very often subjected to some kind of a test to see if they can really concentrate. In this piece, there are three clowns whose task is to attack the meditator-musicians in the mandala. There's only one rule. The clowns can't threaten anybody

physically, but they can approach people in any way to break their attention like by dropping boards, screaming, and one of them speaks in tongues. There's an element of risk, so that the whole piece can fall apart. This gives the work a tension which is resolved eventually. The clowns are attracted away by the crow calls and leave the meditator-musicians in peace, or pieces, as the case may be."

Drums. The music begins. Pounding primitive rhythms circle and build, the pitches of the flutes grow higher and higher, and beneath the incessant circling is a powerful drone. There is the sense of mystery, like being lost on the prairie on a black night and stumbling into an Indian enclave where a ceremony is in progress, capable of something utterly unspeakable, and whether it is good or bad, you do not know.

A terrifying scream fills the hall, chilling, destroying all complacency. Sticks seem to break, stones clap ominously, objects drop, everywhere there is clapping, stomping, incessant rhythms, laughs, cries. It is like being born or dying and impossible to say which. A shaman voice enters to explain it all, but the words he utters are indecipherable and in a strange language, so only the mystery remains. Then gradually, mercifully, it all falls away, like the ending of a dream. A profound stillness. And then, thunderous applause. #