

"Music with Roots in the Aether," a 14-hour video program featuring seven contemporary composers and their works at the Mandeville Art Gallery

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"Music with Roots in the Aether," a 14-hour video program featuring seven contemporary composers and their works, will be shown in the Mandeville Center Art Gallery at the University of California, San Diego from May 21 through June 12.

The series was designed and directed by Robert Ashley, a composer who has featured himself along with Pauline Oliveros of UC San Diego, David Behrman, Philip Glass, Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma and Terry Riley in the program. One hour is devoted to an interview with each artist and another hour spent on a performance of each composer's music.

The gallery will be set up to provide a comfortable environment for viewing.

"The talk, like the music, is fascinating, and, with the documentary, Ashley has suddenly become the Studs Terkel of the avant-garde," wrote a critic in American Film.

In the interviews, the work habits, philosophies and eccentricities of each artist are revealed. The music itself is unorthodox, and, as the title of the program suggests, seems to flow from the upper regions of the artists' consciousness.

Oliveros, a member of the UC San Diego Department of Music faculty, discusses meditation and modes of consciousness in her interview. She is a composer who worked with electronic music in the 1960s, but has since moved on to meditational and conceptual pieces that often include the audience. On the tape, she performs a piece called "Rose Mountain Slow Runner," which offers a combination of accordion and voice in a study of beats, tones, timbres and vocal resonances.

In order to lend visual interest to the performance of Behrman's piece, "Music with Melody-Driven Electronics," the camera shoots the event using mirrors, which gives a distorted sense of direction to the viewer.

"Landscape with Alvin Lucier" is Lucier's interview and a performance involving a dancer, canoe music and Lucier practicing his fly-casting. (The music is created when a microphone scanning the canoe picks up the high frequencies generated by two oscillators.) A performance of a piece by Lucier made with recorded brain wave patterns is also shown.

Glass performs his works with an ensemble of electric organs, winds and voice. Glass is known for his work with experimental theater, opera and lengthy works distinguished by a repetitive-structure style. He recently completed an opera commissioned by the City of Rotterdam for the Netherlands Opera, and won a special Obie Award in 1976 for his compositions.

The interview with Mumma takes place in a football stadium while Mumma polishes and oils his bicycle. For the performance of "Schoolwork," a piece for crosscut saw, the crew moves to an amusement park at dawn. His movements while climbing in a quarry are picked up by the electronic circuitry in his backpack for "Telepos/Foxbat."

Riley is interviewed at his home in Northern California while he is milking his goat. He moves to a redwood house under construction to demonstrate the blend of Eastern mystical music and jazz that he has achieved in his improvisational music, performed on an electric organ with a tape delay system.

Ashley is interviewed by his assistant, Robert Sheff. Known as a pioneer in the development of music theater and large-scale, collaborative performance, he considers "Music with Roots in the Aether" to be a performance piece rather than a documentary. His "What She Thinks," a theatrical stream-of-consciousness speech which combines Whistler's Mother, Beethoven and George Washington, is presented on tape.

"One can watch the interviews again and again and learn more about these people each time, as well as about the way one experiences the acquisition of knowledge; how much we can absorb at any one moment and how much artists can give to each other when the element of trust is established," wrote Joan La Barbara in Musical America.

"Ashley, being a composer, trusts his own insight and the composers in turn trust him enough to expose the most fragile inner workings of the creative process as they experience it," she added.

The gallery is open from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through Friday and from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays. An opening reception is scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, May 21. Admission is free.

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