

LIVE IN L.A.

EXQUISITE CORPSE at the Schindler House, July 24

You know conceptual improvisation can be a swamp. But then you recall skillful past navigations, note the quality of the performers and attend. This effort drew from a Surrealist exercise where several artists complete one picture without seeing the others' contributions. Society for the Activation of Social Space Through Art & Sound co-programmer Cindy Bernard said it was co-programmer Joe Potts' idea to take off from that "exquisite corpse" notion via a series of musical pairings tailored to the Schindler's unique right-angle courtyard openings (yes, the players could hear each other), and co-programmer Tom Recchion helped assemble the cast. It was good, especially in memory.

Bearish Kris Tiner, the solo opener, breathed animalistic trumpet multiphonics, and his single-note urgings provoked responses from our feet even sans beat. Joining opposite, Joseph Berardi bent scribelike to execute subtle clanks, clonks, bass thumps and strange grooves (from Nippon to Buddy Rich) on his percussion mess. Tiner faded; Berardi went solo — that was the format throughout — and the latter's triggered voice samplings eased a subliminal transition to elegant vocal priestess Weba Garretson, whose intense narrative dynamics ranged from cool water to violent freezing orgasm and sleep. Keyboard miser Mitchell Brown dreamed/droned onward in harmony, wafting a Zen mood with solemn organ and gentle synth

loops. A fresh but sad Petra Haden overlapped, singing bare and vulnerable before stretching resinous beauty from her violin. G.E. Stinson ghosted his white goatee into the dusk with rarefied guitar effects, interpolating a loop of Asian chanting that reinforced one of the evening's unstated motifs. Tiner faded back in to close the circle, and it all slipped away.

The quiet music was most appropriate to the location and the funereal theme. A chill breeze had passed through. Day had become night unnoticed. We had all continually interacted with the garden doves and the helicopters. *Liberté, égalité, variété.* (Greg Burk)

CALENDAR

MUSIC REVIEW

Giving voice to the 'Exquisite Corpse'

Performance at Schindler House adds music and architecture to the artistic parlor game that charmed Surrealists 80 years ago.

By JOSEF WOODARD
Special to The Times

Sabotaging rational, waking logic was one of the Surrealists' primary ideas of fun. By shuffling recognizable conventions rather than abandoning or abstracting them, they worked both angles of the familiarity reflex. Such is the scheme behind the Surrealist parlor game known as exquisite corpse, in which one artist draws a body part unseen by others in a collective art project. The result is a composite portrait with plenty of chance in the mix.

In Saturday's musical adaptation, part of the experimental "sound" series at the Schindler House in West Hollywood, the game pieces involved musicians and architecture and X factors arising from the spatial interaction of the two. Historical connections also hummed beneath the surface, given that the Modernist Schindler House design dates from 1922 and that Andre Breton's Surrealist manifesto was issued in 1924. Both Modernists and Surrealists sought to upend an existing cultural order but with different means.

Devotees of both schools might well have appreciated this project, although the mostly improvisational language drawn on by these six Los Angeles-based musicians would have been alien then. For this real-time "Exquisite Corpse," musicians were dis-

persed around the house, facing the backyard-centered audience, celebrating the house's indoor-outdoor spirit. Sonic segues led from one musician's solo segment to the next, with duet encounters lining the progression. Kris Tiner's opening trumpet sounds, in craggy textures and sparse, cracked phrases, made the quasi-clarion call from a corner of the yard. Drummer Joseph Berardi, in the living room across the lawn, played off Tiner's syncopations. Berardi's solo ended with drum-triggered vocal samples leading naturally into vocalist Weba Garretson's solo, combining extended and electronics-enhanced sounds with a dramatic thread concerning domestic abuse and the unsettling stuff of dreams.

Mitchell Brown's intriguing blend of real and electronic sounds opened with bowed cables, producing a gravelly voice-like sound similar to Hans Reichl's daxophone, flowing into Petra Haden's voice and violin segment. Haden's enchanting section was the show's most melody-driven, weaving through twisted folk song phrases and briefly quoting the kitschy five-note chant of the "Close Encounters" theme, a surreal touch given the evening's decidedly non-Hollywood flavor.

Guitarist G.E. Stinson's wild and emotionally cool variations on the theme of electric guitar vocabulary ended in softly brushed chords over which Tiner returned to tie up the performance in a lyrical cloud of a duet. The effect was a mutant musical portrait, flattering both the magical host setting and this loose coalition of local experimentalists.