

BUZZ

SOUND GARDEN:
William Winant
bangs the drum slowly



The Gong Show

EXPERIMENTAL COMPOSERS REDEFINE HOUSE MUSIC
AT SCHINDLER'S PAD BY DAVE GARDETTA

THE OTHER DAY PERCUSSIONIST William Winant was walking through West Hollywood's Schindler House, smacking at things with a stick. Winant is a very large man with a big head, a round face like a pale melon, and the cigar-chomping, no-nonsense style of a guy who might give you a hard time at the deli counter. He was wearing an X-large Sonic Youth T-shirt, and he was giving the interior of the Schindler a hard time. Stuff getting smacked included mixing bowls, gongs, metal cones, two kettle drums, wooden blocks, a tam-tam, some pipes, an Aztec log, temple bells, and a giant tin funnel that Winant said "was used to sort out grapes, but it's not called a 'grape sorter-outer.'"

The Schindler House—actually it's called the Kings Road House, but everyone knows it as the Schindler—has been over the last century home to the architect Rudolph Schindler, the birth of California modernism, and currently the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, which sits off in a side room amid a lot of office-machine clutter. The MAK has turned the Schindler into a museum, and since some of the artists who show there are known to combine Aztec logs with grape sorter-outers, the sight of Winant smashing things presented an urgent question: Should somebody collar the guy before he pounded more art?

Someone interceded. "That's really good,

Willie," said a man with a reedy frame who stepped into the room wearing white sneakers and a scrubby beard that made him look like an experimental-music composer. He was, in fact, James Tenney, the experimental-music composer, whose composition *Maximusic* Winant was smashing out. "But how long can you play that section?"

"Ugh!" said Winant, collapsing onto a stool. "About 90 seconds is all I can do."

While Los Angeles is a noisy city with great weather and some fabulous examples of modernist architecture, no one had thought of combining these elements until last summer, when artist Cindy Bernard started working with the MAK to produce avant-garde concerts at the

▶▶ Schindler. Bernard has short, brunet hair, an excitable manner around really good experimental music, and a history of staging sound events in resonant and not-so-resonant locales. "I only produce shows in places not designed for them," she said. "I did a show at the Giant Rock in the Mojave, where aliens are said to have visited a café owner, and a show at a meeting hall in San Pedro, which came out of a series of things at an old, abandoned furniture factory."

Sometimes, however, L.A.'s music intelligentsia just want to drape sweaters over their shoulders and sip chardonnay. They want their own Hollywood Bowl, which is why Bernard's shows quickly sell out. Tenney's compositions were to open this summer's program, and though everyone wanted a good show from Winant that night, the unspoken goal seemed to be harmonizing the producer's fondness for out-of-the-way spaces with the composer's theories of tone perception and the performer's desire just to be heard. All that was happening at once at the Schindler.

"Where's the best spot to play the tam-tam for *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*?" Tenney asked no one in particular. *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion* requires Winant to play the gong-like tam-tam as quietly and then as loudly as possible for 15 minutes without pause.

"I think we need to put the tam-tam on the house," said Winant, eyeing the roofline, apparently warming to the idea of whacking a gong as loud as a 737 for several minutes over West Hollywood.

Almost immediately Bernard was on the roof, waving her arms and shouting, "Not up here—the center roof won't hold weight."

"Okay," said Tenney, shrugging his shoulders and shooting Winant a what-me-worry look. "Not the roof."

The conversation turned to the band Spastic Colon, then to sound experiments supposedly conducted by the army that made people lose control of their bodily functions, then to the tam-tam again.

"How about if we place it in the garden doorway?" Winant asked Tenney.

Tenney looked at the tam-tam, then the doorway, then at Winant, then back to the tam-tam. "All right, the garden doorway it is," he finally said, and sat down under a tree. "One decision made, several hundred to go." LA