

MUSIC REVIEW

Summer brings a deep-end dunking

The seasonal 'sound.' series is an exploration of music's far side, with clever reinvention, at the Schindler House.

By JOSEF WOODARD
Special to The Times

In a company town where commercial film music was born, raised and still thrives, it can be startling and invigorating to encounter examples from the medium's experimental end. A taste from the far side unfolded at the Schindler House on Friday, the start of the two-evening program "Scores Composed for the Moving Image," closing the summer series, "sound."

For Michael Webster, moving images were words on a screen, set dancing and "singing" by his keyboard. For George Lockwood, the imagery was an impressionistic blur of footage from rural Ireland, aptly married to an impressionistic blur of live Irish music, spatially dispersed in rooms encircling the audience in the Schindler House's back garden.

Exploring fringe-culture possibilities has been key to the Society for the Activation of Social

Space through Art and Sound, which has brightened several summer seasons with "sound." — mostly in the atmospheric and architectural splendor of the Schindler House/MAK Center.

This year's stylistically democratic series touched on fringes of pop (Petra Haden doing the Who), jazz (Kelan Philip Cohran) and film music syntheses.

Reversals of role and expectations abounded Friday, the first of which was the clever reinvention of music-text relationship in Webster's "Fade on Family," a setting of Diane Ward's poem.

Dialing in a scruffy electric piano sound on a digital keyboard, Webster played his score — in a diatonic, quasi-gamelan harmonic language — and triggered the flow of words. Alternate voices of a child, mother and father were defined by screen positioning, and the odd format suggested opera super-titles, minus the opera. Most important, its dramatic character was bolstered by a kindred emotional spirit between music and text — evocative without being lucid.

Lockwood, whose day job is in visual effects in Hollywood, called his art piece "Seisiun" a "work in progress" in a post-concert Q&A. It does have a ragged, unfinished feeling, underscored by an occasional digital glitch in the projection of Pat O'Neill's video footage. Yet its dreamlike charm resides in its funkiness of assembly. Musicians achieved a textural mashing effect, playing in different keys, tempos and rooms.

With his sight-sound orchestration, Lockwood both celebrates and deconstructs assumptions based on rootsy Celtic music and landscape imagery. We expect ascetic fidelity in both areas but got something extra, and extra strange.