

Saxophonist Lacy plays Mac Hall

Rare York appearance for dixieland-gone-free soprano improvising master

By RICHARD UNDERHILL

Soprano saxophone giant Steve Lacy and two members of his current group performed an ambitious concert yesterday afternoon in McLaughlin Hall. Ambitious because the trio consisted of such an odd choice of instruments—Lacy on soprano, Steve Potts on alto, and Irene Aebi vocals—and ambitious because most of the concert was improvised. The resulting musical textures ranged from the kaleidoscopic soloing of Potts and Lacy, to sparse, structured melodic interludes featuring Aebi, to wild, animalistic free-blowing.

Lacy, well-known in jazz circles as an avant-garde innovator, suprisingly began his career emulating the styles of Sidney Bechet in the dixieland bands of people like Rex Steward and Hot Lips Page. He made the stratospheric leap in musical styles in the late 1950s when he teamed up with free-jazz pianist Cecil Taylor. Working with Taylor, arranger Gil Evans, and trombonist Roswell Rudd in New York during the '60s, Lacy eventually joined the exodus of many new-music players to Europe, where he has lived and worked since 1968.

At Mac Hall yesterday, Lacy performed a single work, composed by Lacy but influenced by the writings and sketches of French painter George Brecht. The composition was divided into 14 sections of improvisation, each separated by a melodic, text excerpt from Brecht's notebook.

Although Aebi sang in French, her repeated melodic fragments helped to tie the work together—the saxophonists' improvisations ranged from energetic to earth-shaking.

Listening to Lacy is really like learning the possibilities of the instrument. From guttural grunts and barn-yard honkings to voice-like textures, Lacy's playing always speaks to the listener. Although inexperienced avant-garde musicians tend to use such extra-musical sounds for mere effect, Lacy approaches each new texture and sound musically and melodically, often with humorous results.

Where Lacy manages to get a great range of textures, altoist Potts tended towards the gruffer side of things. Potts favors technical trips, punctuated by the occasional blunt outburst from his lower registers. No doubt influenced by Anthony Braxton, Potts' sound is amazingly piercing in quality.

Lacy and company came to York on extremely short notice, and as a consequence, the show was too sparsely



Photo: ROMAN PAWLYSHYN

Soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy at York yesterday. Lacy, who has lived and worked in Europe since 1968, appears at Larry's Hideaway on Carleton St. tonight.

attended. For those who missed it (and for those who didn't), Lacy and his touring group appear tonight at Larry's Hideaway on Carleton St. Lacy's band tonight will be a sextet with Potts, Aebi, pianist Bobby Few, bassist Jean-Jacques Avenel, and drummer Oliver Johnson. On the same bill what is reportedly an astounding theatrical big band from Holland, the Willem Breuker Kollektief. Highly recommended.

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