

ENTERTAINMENT

Computer Art: future entertainment

Suri Epstein

In this age of information, in which all aspects of life are effected by the rapid advancements of the computer, one can only expect man's perception and understanding of art to keep abreast with the pace of these developments. The relatively new field of computer art films was discussed November 20 at the Nat Taylor Cinema at York by pioneer and international leader of this area, John Whitney Sr.

With a background in photography and music composition, Whitney became interested in the relationships between harmonious and visual patterns in the early 1940's. He wondered if the twelve tone 'alphabet' of music was perhaps a basis for constructing a pattern in space and time. Whitney began exploring these possibilities in 1940, through a grant from IBM, which resulted in his first computer generated film.

In his lecture, Whitney briefly

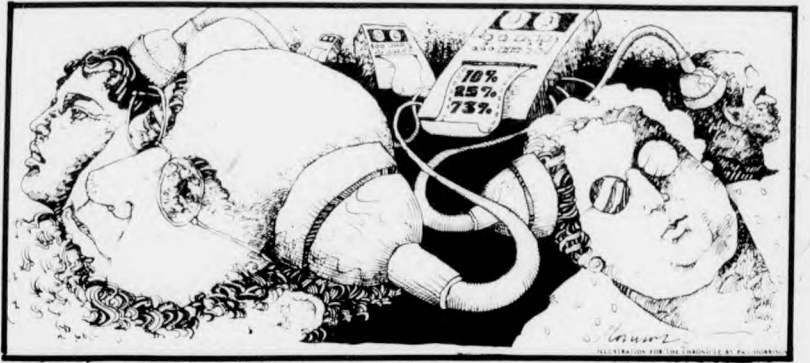
described the process of connecting the wires of his camera to the computer and devising several displays and equations that visually resolved themselves. The results are a kind of dotted and linear play, through strictly horizontal and vertical movements on three dimensional space. His film *per-mu-ta-tions* uses the circle as a visual theme. The effect is somewhat reminiscent of spirograph or Laserium patterns.

In his explorations, Whitney began to notice that the harmonic play of the points was causing visual patterns that were by no means randomly arrived at. He discovered that the process of the random leads to order, which in turn leads back to random in an endless cycle. Whitney admits that his understanding of these graphics has become more mathematical, and he attributes many of the new findings back to Pythagorus.

His recent book, *Digital Harmony* delves into the new field of micro-computer based visual art. In this book, Whitney discusses and explains the innate response of the human system to an order/disorder harmonic relationship.

As for the films, they are not totally conceptual variations on the computer theme. The film *Arabesque* was inspired by the geometrical patterns of the tiles of early periods of Islamic culture. The snake-like movements of the lines strongly parallel the Arab music.

In the 1940's when Frank Lloyd Wright saw Whitney's films, he described them as "icing for the cake that hasn't been baked yet." Whitney feels that the 1980's will be the decade of that cake. The rate of technological advancement is now outpacing the actual accomplishments of these machines. Whitney notes that the two-year-old computer he is using for his present film will be obsolete by the time he



Pat Morrison

finishes it.

As far as the direction of music at this point, Whitney says, "we can't just go on composing Mozart waltzes." He cites Debussy as an example of a "towering personality who did an intuitive, an inevitable thing with dignity, in his own time." Whitney feels that the 20th century poses a serious challenge to the composer because, "the computer is here".

Whitney described the best music as the "hardest to enjoy at first". His vision of the 1980's is

one in which musicians will be able to compose in the visual as well as aural field. He calls it "an interweaving, question/answer interplay between the visual and aural." And what is this visual and aural interplay all about? "In art," answers Whitney, "we are dealing with what the human being is about and enjoys." It is the dignity and humanism of this man and his vision that help make the technological advances of this century as exciting as they are.

Only the memories survive for Little Feat

Steven Hacker

Unfortunately for rock music fans, Little Feat, perhaps the biggest cult band of the seventies, never appeared in Toronto. What we did get, however, was a couple of sets by a group billed as the **Former Members of Little Feat** at the El Mocambo last week.

The band, still without a real name, consists of four holdovers from the last Feat album: Paul Barrere, Sam Clayton, Kenny Gradney, and Richie Hayward. A second guitarist, Phil Brown has been added to fill the shoes of the late Lowell George, the highly regarded leader of the group.

In a city that has recently seen the resurrection of several top 70's bands such as King Crimson and the Mingus Dynasty and despite high expectations, their concerts have been disappointing. The Feat show was no exception. Although Paul Barrere still plays a mean Stratocaster and was responsible for composing and singing many of the band's most

popular songs such as **High Roller**, **Old Folks Boogie**, and **Skin It Back**, it was obvious that the presence of Lowell George's powerful vocals, brilliant slide guitar work, and overall guidance was greatly missed. *Waiting For Columbus*, the concert recording that became the standard of excellence for live rock music seemed miles away from the El Mo.



Little Feat are just bits and pieces now.

Routine versions of some of Barrere's Little Feat hits were

performed plus a rhythmically revamped version of **High Roller**. These were for the most part entertaining. Barrere's new material did not fare as well. Most of the tunes were not that interesting; **88 Degrees** being the least forgettable. The show also seemed to lack balance, with no ballads and only one instrumental performed.

Since the death of Lowell George, this is the first real tour for Little Feat. Judging by the packed house at the El Mocambo there seems to be a demand for the group, who will be mainly playing in bars on this tour but would be now, according to Barrere, filling large arenas if not for George's death. In fact, while touring Europe with Joan Armatrading, drummer Richie Hayward heard audiences changing "Feat! Feat!"

The solo careers of the Feat members never took off following the group's break up. Some of Barrere's compositions have been recorded by people like Cher and Nicolette Larsen, but session work has not been plentiful and the idea of a seventy-five date tour grossing \$250,000 seemed attractive to the band members. Little Feat's original record company, WEA, has no plans to record this new band but the musicians plan to get in the studio and then find a label. Barrere also plans a solo album.

For those wishing to hear the band as it once was, Warner Brothers has released *Hoy-Hoy*, a collection of material recorded by the band over the last eight years and not previously released. Paul Barrere acknowledged that the previous album, *Down on the Farm*, "was not a real fitting finish to the whole thing. *Hoy-Hoy* is a nice home movie, a lot of pictures and behind the scenes stories — some of which I wish had not been printed."

With its informative and colourful booklet and liner notes, (each song is prefaced by a paragraph about what went on in the studio at the time of the recording) *Hoy-Hoy* is a useful addition to any Feat fan's collection. Those just starting to discover this band should also check out some of their important 70's releases such as *The Last Record Album* and *Waiting For Columbus*.

Jimmy Cliff: bongo man

Mark Lewis

Bongo Man, now playing at the Eaton Centre Cineplex, might be alternately titled "From Africa to Babylon: Jimmy Cliff in Jamaica", for there are many parallels between it and *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China*. Both films are about men who are acknowledged masters of their music (reggae and Western classical music respectively). Both are concerned with presenting aspects of Jamaica's/China's culture as it relates to the music they espouse. And both films are quite chauvanistic in their ideologies.

But, where the Stern film hides this chauvanism behind the mask of the "universality" of Western classical music, the stricter regionality of reggae music cannot hide the cultural politics that lie behind it. It is for this reason that *Bongo Man* doesn't have the same impact that *From Mao to Mozart* has, for *Bongo Man* can't catch hold of the cultural beliefs we already have and reinforce them in an emotional way; reggae is still too new to our culture for that. Instead, it is forced to rely on the infectiousness of the music and its star, Jimmy Cliff, to make emotional contact with its audience.

Luckily, reggae and Rastafarians could have no better prophet and spokesman than Jimmy Cliff. The purity of his beliefs is matched by the purity of his voice, and the strength of both is what gives him great screen presence. What he talks and sings about (freedom, liberation, love, politics and politricks, poverty and hardship), forces us to reappraise our position in his terms. The *Bongo Man*, proclaiming his beliefs through concerts held around the world, and in films like this and his previous film *The Harder They Come*, clearly has a calling to his faith, and while the film may not have *From Mao to Mozart*'s emotional impact, *Bongo Man* more than compensates by allowing us to view the world through eyes and a culture other than our own, expanding our experience instead of simply reinforcing it. And the music is great, too.

Orton's Sloane is savage

Elliott Lefko and George Kirby

Orton's death was laced with the irony of his own fascination with the grotesque. Less than one month after he had entered in his diary, "I have high hopes of dying in my prime", Joe Orton was battered to death with a hammer by Kenneth Halliwell in the London flat they had shared for fifteen years. Halliwell was driven by extreme jealousy but what other factors motivated him to such a violent extreme can never really be ascertained; he committed suicide immediately after murdering Orton. All that remains certain is the fact that with one final blow, Halliwell silenced forever the black and biting wit of a contemporary genius.

"The ripeness is all."

-Shakespeare

The times are ripe for Joe Orton and his savagely funny work about the meeting between the seedy underworld and the middle class; *The Entertaining Mr. Sloane* runs for the next three weeks at the Toronto Free Theatre.

Mr. Sloane rings with desire, passion, and greed. The characters wear their fantasies proudly; the fortyish, toothless woman searching for a twenty-year-old baby she can mother; the repressed mid-thirties homosexual businessman looking to "stand behind" a strong young man; and the object of their desires — the lazy, guilt-free boy who is content to side with whomever is paying for dinner.

Played in three acts, the *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* is very entertaining with enough of a sub-text to leave one puzzling over the fabric and make-up of our society.



A York drama first!

Laurie Kruk

How many times does a hit play, currently showing on Broadway make it to the York campus stages? More importantly, how many empty evenings have you squandered, that begged for a little more stimulating entertainment than a few hundred games of *Space Invaders*?

Drama student Alex Galatis has solved both these problems, with a production of the sparkling new play *Fifth of July*. A highly contemporary play written by established American playwright Lanford Wilson, this is a comedy that tricks you — for "there's always something going on beneath the laughter". So says Galatis, third year drama student, and director of the play.

"It's about people trying to come to grips with their past, while living in the present," says Galatis. "You take eight people, all of whom have secrets and scars — for instance, the main character's a paraplegic, he lost both his legs in Vietnam — and put them together in one house for two days, and watch how they relate. It sometimes borders on farce, but it's too sensitive for that. And it's not satire, either. I

guess it's a kind of soap opera — on the surface, anyway."

"You see, I think this is a first for York theatre, because we've picked a show that is a hit on Broadway right now," continues Galatis. "It's not a classic, it's not an experimental piece, it's people, with everyday quirks and habits — and some bitterness, too. They are people you can relate to and care about. Although many, many parts of it are humorous, it has a message. A timely one, I think, because it's not a revival of the sixties, or anything like that. Although the lead character lost his legs in the Vietnam war, that is not the main theme. His character is deeply affected by that, but then all the characters are affected by their past experiences and mistakes. But they're dealing with them as they affect them today, 1981. And yet, I stress the fact that it is humorous. Humour that makes you think about it, after the play has ended."

Fifth of July is showing at the Atkinson Studio Theatre, on December 2, 3, 4 and 5, at 8:00 p.m. (matinee: 2:00 p.m. on December 5). Admission is 50¢.