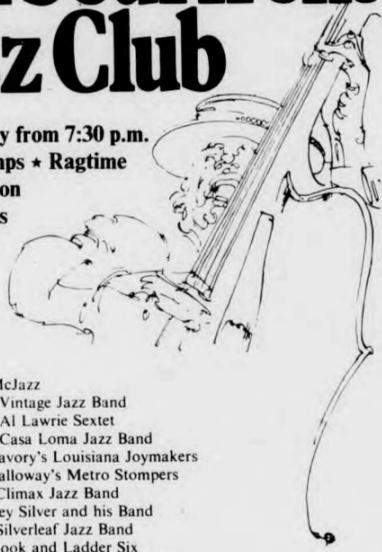


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Casey Sokol, master of improv is York's youngest music prof

By MAXINE KOPEL
and SARAH LAWLEY

When the art of expression is applied to music, it can transform a stale or banal piece of music into an imaginary journey.

Experimental and improvisational music are two facets of the art that are undergoing a resurgence of power within the York music department, with the help of one of the department's leading proponents for improvisation. Casey Sokol, a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts and the University of Buffalo, has been teaching at York since 1971 and is currently being considered for tenure. He teaches Contemporary Improvisation 321, and at age 28, is the department's youngest faculty member.

SELF - EXPRESSION

Sokol's ideas of music do not coincide with the more conventional modes: His music invites self-expression.

"Music is not obliged to return to itself. It's an on-going exploration." To Sokol and his students, self-expression is the key element. Their music is not fragmented with different themes or movements; it is one flowing entity.

"Composers always have a place for ambiguity because it opens more possibilities..." Sokol has a disciplined approach to his work, yet strongly believes in free expression. In essence, the musician must have a musically intellectual background to remain consistent while at the same time he must contribute an equal amount of self-expression. A blend of the two is what the final product should be; if the artistry is more expressive than intellectual, it will not hold together.

FINE LINE

"There's a fine line between experimenting and self-indulgence. It's a question of not denying anything... everyone has a background, training, and repertoire. It's a question of bringing things into context, especially with other musicians so they can begin to see a design and formal elements of style... how styles relate to each other.

"In the experimental part of it, we're encouraging students and finding people willing to forego the incredible attraction of fixed frames of reference."

The Canadian Creative Music Collective, a group of six musicians Sokol performs with, compose their music as they perform it. Each musician reflects a different background and training.

The group does most of its practicing, performing, and recording at the Canadian Creative Music Gallery. Located at 30 St. Patrick St., the CCMG, which opened in January, 1975, has three resident musicians from 10-5 daily who will perform with anyone who saunters in with their instruments.

REGULAR SERIES

The public is welcome to use the recording facilities as well. The gallery has a regular late night series of visiting artists on Saturday nights with an occasional Sunday afternoon thrown in. The CCMC performs Tuesday and Fridays at 9. However, rock and roll diehards and good old country folkies may not receive a showery welcome.

"There is a bias towards the experimental," explains Sokol. Other styles of music already have homes they can turn to, and by catering to the already-too-familiar musical modes, the CCMC gallery would be denying experimental music.

FLOWING CONTINUUM

The ensemble's music is a

flowing continuum, which may or may not have a recurring pulse or theme. As demonstrated on one of the CCMC's albums (volume 1) each piece (there's one on each side, features a variety of instruments, following each other in line. It is unlike most "progressive" records one finds in that there appears to be no particular melody or bass line. A trumpet may sound a few notes, then pause, followed by a brief sax solo, followed by another pause. Later on, the instruments join in together. To some listeners it is like a recorded jam session; to others it is a classic work of art. No matter at what end of the spectrum the listener places himself, Sokol explains that "the music comes out of much practice".

Sokol describes his music as using a "rhythmic ambiguity." The style does not present individual fragments and sections, but instead displays phrases flowing into one another.

Last week the CCMC received a \$10,000 Canada Council Touring Arts grant to conduct a tour of Canada. Says Sokol, "we can take as long as we like. We want to begin in December and take about two weeks or so. Maybe we can find other work in California". Cities included in the ensemble's tour are Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria. The majority of the concerts will take place in the various 15 galleries in the cities similar to Toronto's St. Patrick gallery.



FAR FROM IMPULSE

Sokol feels that "education takes you as far as possible from the creative impulse. Most lose it forever." He sees the duty of a dedicated teacher as placing emphasis on the student's creativity, rather than solely on the technical exponent. "I was extremely fortunate that my first piano teacher taught me how to read, interpret music, as well as show me a systematic approach to improvisation... Lessons often feed one part and starve the other."

However, he is optimistic about York's music department. "It's progressing...it's mounting a graduate program which focuses on a specialty of the department. This allows the student to view all musical activity going on. This is very unusual for graduate study which is mostly directed to historical musicology. The whole bias at York for contemporary concerns makes it, for me, a lively program."

As a matter of fact, York is one of the few academic institutions offering improvisation. In what Sokol describes as a "friendly home," he says of York, "it's a relaxed atmosphere. This department is willing to search out new methods."

Through a magazine called Parallelogramme, interested folks can find out who will be playing where and when in upcoming months. The magazine, which is still in the process of establishing itself, also explains what the galleries are like, talks about equipment, and other shop talk.

When the CCMC is in concert the group's attention spans farther than its stage performance. "One of the most unusual things about a concert," maintains Sokol, "is watching the audience." In the midst of the rhythmic complexities "people are doing a completely different beat. We take the boxes away that help supply the structure."

One misconception, Sokol points out, happens when people go to concerts. They anticipate an evening of total enjoyment and carry high expectations of what the concert may hold in store for them. "If you get thirty seconds of magic out of a concert, then you're ahead." The musical feeling must arrive naturally, with no systematic effort on the part of the listener. Sokol elaborates to say that if an entire concert produced a so-called musical high, it would be too intense, anyway.