

A bicycle built for art

By RICHARD UNDERHILL

Nobody showed up at the Music Gallery for Richard Lerman's newest production. Nobody, that is, except the performers. Neither they nor Lerman were worried about the lack of an audience (the crowds are often sparse at the Music Gallery's alternate performances anyway) and simply hopped on their bikes and cycled out into the dense cultural milieu that is Queen street.

People foraging in the open air craft markets that dot the street gawked as the traveling show whirred merrily by. *That was Art.* *That* was the Toronto premiere and only performance of Richard Lerman's musical/environmental piece entitled "Travelon Gamelon." *That* looked like a lot of fun.

Richard Lerman is a U.S. composer and filmmaker who often works with electronic music. Combining an interest in science and a flair for the absurd, Lerman produces innovative "pieces" for a variety of unconventional "instruments" including typewriters, metal wheel rims, chopsticks, amplified tuning forks, and bicycles.

Eliciting audience participation is the key for Lerman, and last Saturday at the Music Gallery he managed to do this in two ways.

First, members of the Toronto public were asked to bring their bicycles down to the Music Gallery and have them equipped with tiny hub microphones, pen light amplifiers and bell speakers for the performance. Secondly, plastic strips were

inserted into the spokes to make that nostalgic click-a-clack sound that so annoyed your neighbors when you were a kid. When 20 or so bicycles were thus equipped and led down Queen to Spadina, as they were last Saturday, you've got quite a high profile piece of art.

The various gadgets were designed to produce an extremely percussive, deafening roar when the convoy was in motion. Added on top of this the sounds of the bells and bike horns (with which the performers are free to "improvise") and the odd eardrum-piercing screech from amplified braking systems under stress at stop lights.

Because of the mobile nature of "Travelon Gamelon," the Toronto Saturday shopping and driving community were also involved in the event—it travelled down Queen, North on Spadina to Harbord and back down University to the Music Gallery on Queen.

A tape of the performance revealed car horns, amused shouts, and disgruntled exclamations throughout the performance. Lerman acknowledges and desires such participation in his performances—he feels that it's a good idea to bring art to the street.

This is a fine notion, but whether "Travelon Gamelon" is art is a moot point. Taking his premise from the dense percussive textures of Balinese Gamelon music, a style which has also influenced the likes of John Cage, Lerman has sought to produce a floating milieu governed by the rules of chance.

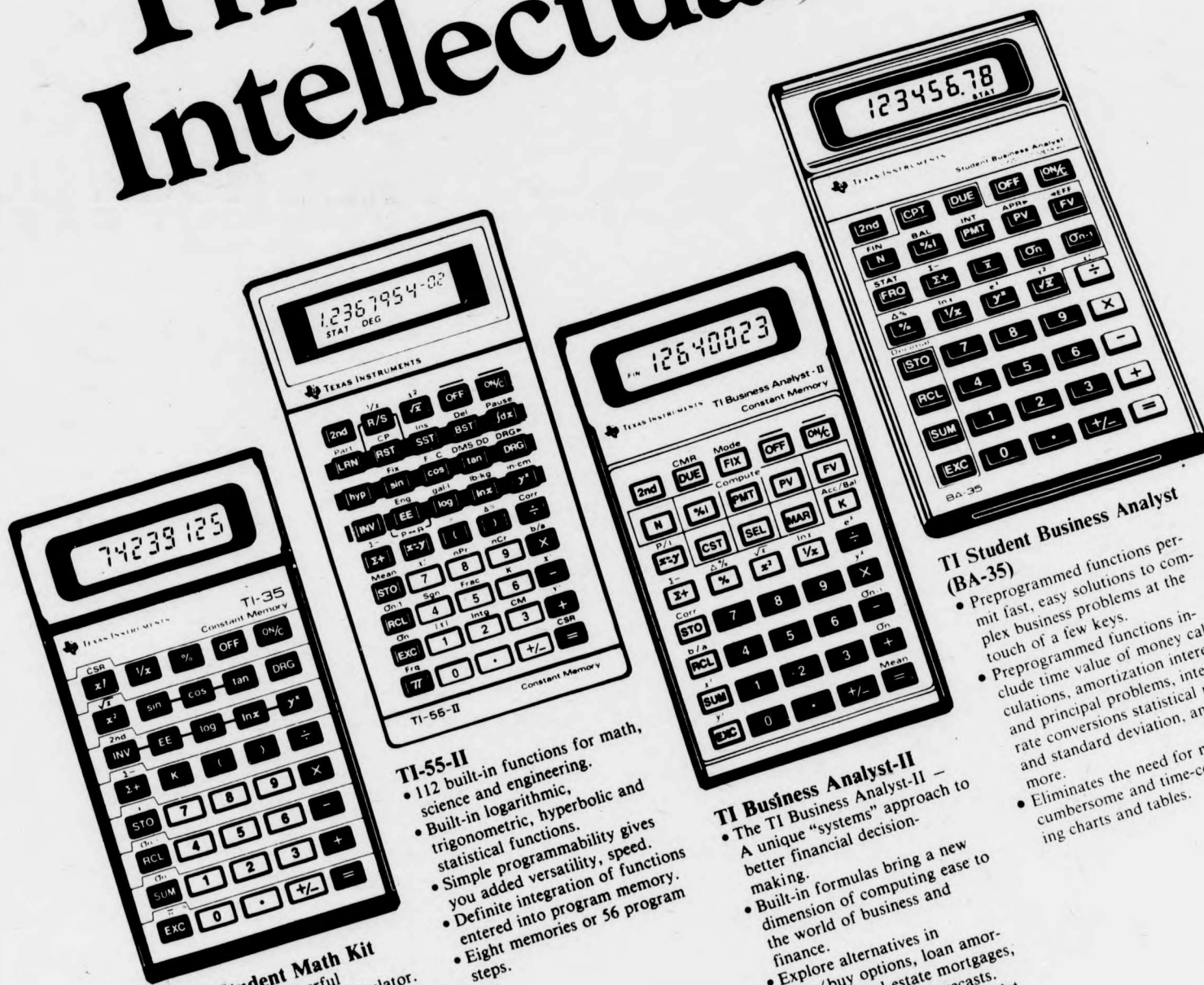


PHOTO: RICHARD UNDERHILL
The finale of Richard Lerman's "Travelon Gamelon"—bringing art to the streets.

Interesting and humorous, as Lerman's piece was, it was also a fine place to meet other bikers who partook in the event, and a good bit of satire directed at those who take *their* art seriously.

Unfortunately, Lerman was on his way to Buffalo (suitcase of speakers under his arm) at last report, so "Travelon Gamelon" is his last performance here for a good while. Those who own unicycles, blenders, pop up toasters, and budgies, should take heart that one day in the future they might be asked to participate in one of Lerman's sound creations.

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