

John Mills Cockell group - complex

by Paul O'Keefe

Complex music and the use of a full scale custom-designed synthesizer is a system or process of music not often heard by music enthusiasts in this area. The John Mills Cockell group, a Canadian based outfit, is made up of eccentric keyboard player, ex "Syrinx" member and a Torontonian, J.M. Cockell, followed by an exceptional percussionist, a member of the English tradition in music and born in England, Gordon Phillips. Following Gordon is one of the latest members of the group, a superb bass strutter and a native of Australia, Jerry Lester; last and not least the single handed reed genius born in Canada and the perfect member to an all star Commonwealth team is Ken Spence. Their sound is definitely a unique one which is absorbed by

the complex rock domain of the seventies.

The sound of the seventies was heard throughout the evening at the Cohn. The attendance was not at its peak but those people serious about their music and on finding out where Canada is in relation to keyboard artists showed up to savour the sounds of the unexpected (the reason for the unexpected arose from the fact that the group members are new to each other and the compositions were not completely mastered).

Set number one started with a keyboard leadership pace which took mind and body to a different place other than the concert hall. Sounds of King Crimson, yes and other complex music fabricators were felt creeping and crawling out of the background and into the air

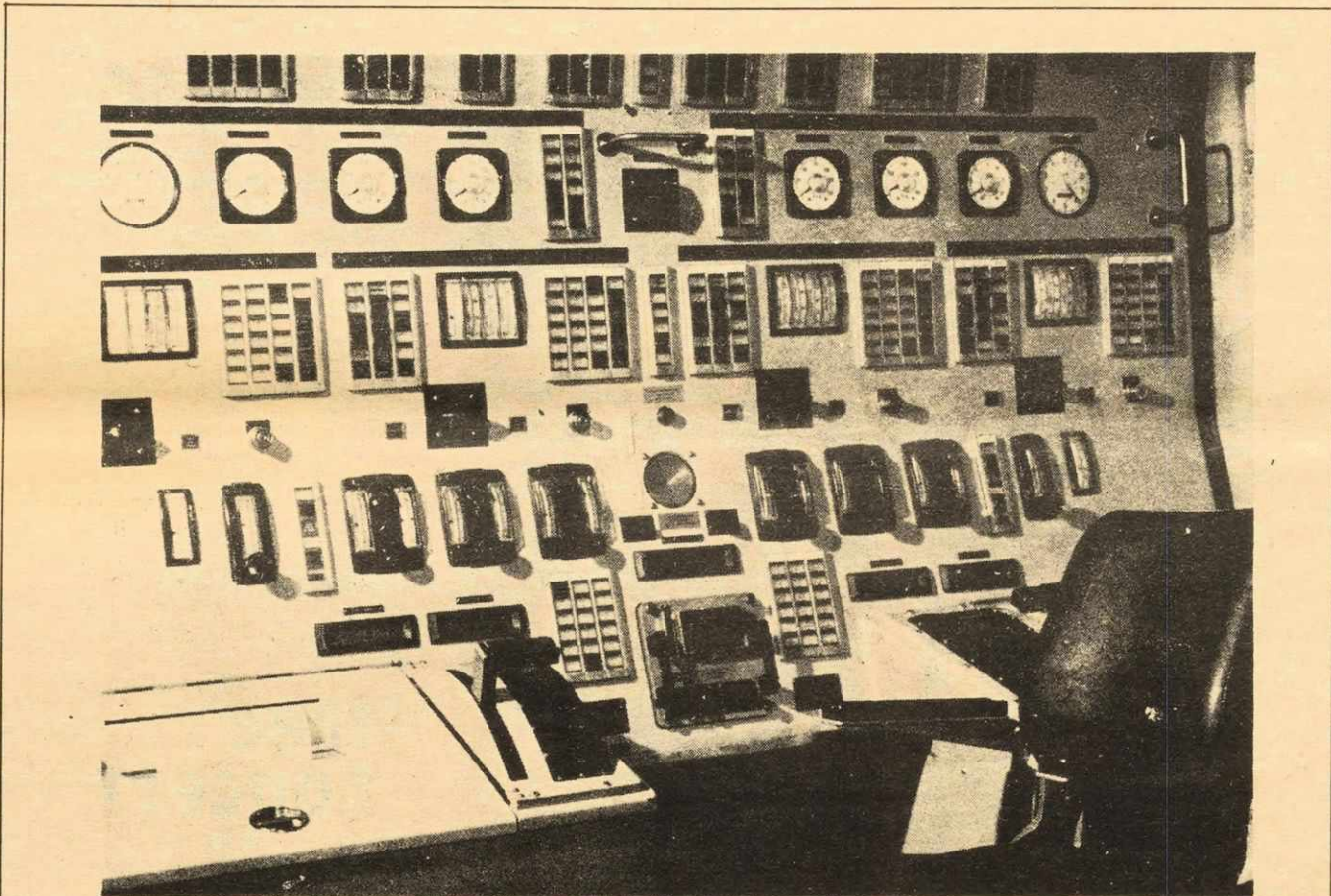
inside the padded Cohn.

The second set started with a brief introduction to the oncoming pieces. With no further delay "Neon Cellerando" started on a very peculiar tempo. The keyboard being constantly the basis for all compositions started making sounds like a fuzzy 1942 radio. The percussionist, Gordon Phillips, began filling in the number with a strange ricky-racky, crackly noise which distracted the listener and dislodged each instrument from the whole of the composition. After the sound defects were finished a strong rhythm and off beat accompaniment brought the whirling, whisking sounds of the keyboard to heights heard only on Mars or Jupiter. Straight piano pulled its weight to change the feeling and to add a classic non-complex portion

to the enhancing sound. There were two other songs after "Neon Cellerando" but they were not easily subtracted from the linear sounding set. The involvement of each instrument produced a continuous flow of beats, bass shots and keyboard abstractions which demonstrated a strong reliance on pinpoint timing and musician competence. There was also a very noticeable break up flow which did not coordinate the hook up of one set of beats to another (flyaway notes). When it came time to make the regular exit to the side of the stage the 1/4 capacity crowd gave a polite cheer to bring back the expected return of the musicians and also the cost of admission.

The well rehearsed encore brought the reed player, Ken Spence, out to show he can also be heard and not only seen. The first encore number was a badly vocalized song called "Party". It consisted of a deep repetitive thud beat, a hard driving layout and a set of lyrics similar to the Doors "The Show Is Over" but could be closer compared to lyrics Alice Cooper would throw in the waste paper basket. The last song of the evening, "Afterthoughts" was a loud piece played with the normal entourage of complex sounds, Miles Davis off beats and cosmic arrays.

With the show being non-glitter and away from total money domination, the Cockell group demonstrated the great coordination needed between musicians to play modern classical rock music at a pace enjoyed by the well informed and elite music public of today. It would be a great pleasure to see this group again in the future because the foot of the hill is along way from the top of the mountain.



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Hilarious Bach

The local music scene will probably not be quite the same after Friday, January 30. That's the night Professor Peter Schickele will be bringing his irreverent and hilarious musical spoof, "The Intimate P.D.Q. Bach" to the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, Dalhousie Arts Centre.

Called "a very, very funny show - even for people who like music but don't know why" by the **New York Times**, Professor Schickele's program brings to audiences the music of the heretofore undiscovered (for reasons which will be made clear) son of the great Johann Sebastian Bach, and proves conclusively that "like father, like son" is not necessarily true. Certainly, in the case of P.D.Q. Bach, blood does **not** run thicker than wine.

The program, which will include such infamous works as "The Toot Suite for Caliope, Four Hands," "Divers Aires and "The Notebook for Betty-Sue Bach" (a group of simple piano pieces for simple pianists), also will feature the noted bargain-counter tenor, John Ferrante who has, for some reason, been with the P.D.Q. Bach Show since its premiere in New York in 1965.

This all-new program will include comments on the life and times of P.D.Q. Bach, fully illustrated by Professor Schickele's collection of rare slides, manuscripts, and other memorabilia. The Professor will also play and demonstrate such unique instruments as the Worm, the Snake, the Windbreaker, and the unusual Baroque Caliope.