

New Music extravaganza

by Juanita Spears

Have you ever wondered how a composer goes about creating a piece of music? Some might envision a young Beethoven hunched over a piano laboriously plunking out each note. Others perhaps visualize Mozart carrying on a witty conversation as he transcribes his fully composed work from his imagination onto manuscript.

Senior composition student, Glenn Halls, takes a more modern approach. "I compose on my Apple computer. I notate it all out, then I have my computer play it back to me. The only real disadvantage to using the computer is that it cannot deal with modern notation because it wants everything to be in neatly metered bars."

However, for the most part, the students said they do most of their composing in their heads before transferring it onto paper. "I make a point of walking to the university in the morning so that I can take that time to compose in my head. When I arrive, I play what I have imagined on the piano to check notes and to see how accurate I can be in notating it," says Doug Schalin, a member of the senior composition class.

"I like to have my whole piece all planned out in my mind's ear from beginning to end before I attempt to notate it," claims Stephen Collins who is studying first year composition.

His classmate, Lisa Nelsen, prefers the hands on approach and does the bulk of her composing at the piano or with the aid of her flute. "I don't really plan ahead of time what I'm going to write. I just use my instinct and write what sounds good to me."

Students do not have to be majoring in composition to register in the courses, however, they should have had extensive musical training. Therefore it attracts different students for different reasons.

Dr. Malcolm Forsyth (prof. senior composition) believes that "to study composition is the very best way to come to grips with everything one learns in music — performance, theory, history, and the study of form and style."

"By just trying to write your own compositions you automatically and unconsciously

begin to synthesize everything (that you have learned). At rock bottom that is what the study of composition should be... training for the next generation of composers does not really enter into it."

However, Dr. John Armstrong (prof. introductory composition) admits that they "should assume that some students could become great composers of the future" but maintains that for whatever reason the students take composition, it will undoubtedly make them better all-round musicians.

Dr. Armstrong believes that the postulate "composition can't be taught" to be a truism. However he does believe, as does Dr. Forsyth, that the introductory course should expose the students to the many basic styles and forms of 20C music. Within as liberal a framework as possible, beginner composers are given assignments to write for specific ensembles, with perhaps restrictions on the length of work, form, and/or compositional technique.

It seems that the students not only need, but appreciate the guidelines and restrictions put on them. "I think it's helpful to have a number of limits placed on you... instead of just being told to go compose a piece of music... especially considering that it is just a 300 course and for many it's their first class in composition," admits Martin Berger.

There are exercises wherein the students are able to express themselves more freely, such as improvisational sessions. "It is the best way to demonstrate certain techniques otherwise not easily definable," explains Armstrong.

"Second year composition is much more free. I might give some vague suggestions as to where we might head, but it is up to the students to choose for themselves what they wish to write and in what style," explains Forsyth.

"I encourage a lot of interchange. I like people to be vocal because each composer needs to know how his music has got across to everyone else in the room — whether it means anything to them, and if so, what it means. Is it positive or negative or does it come across at all? So there is a lot of discus-

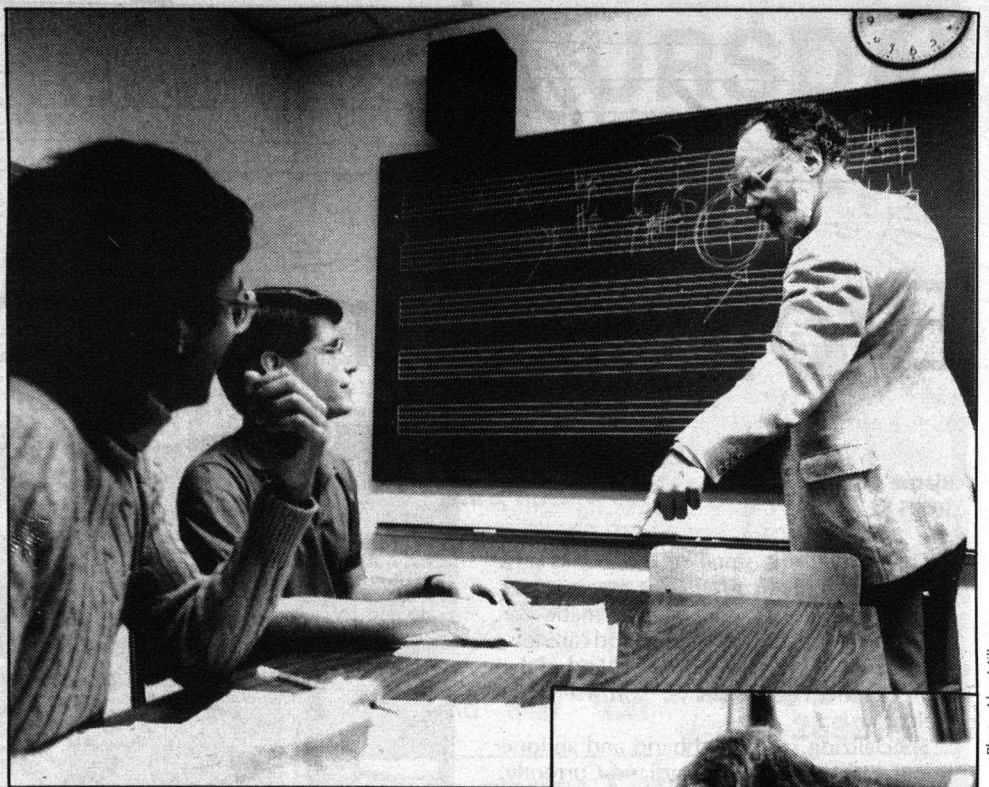
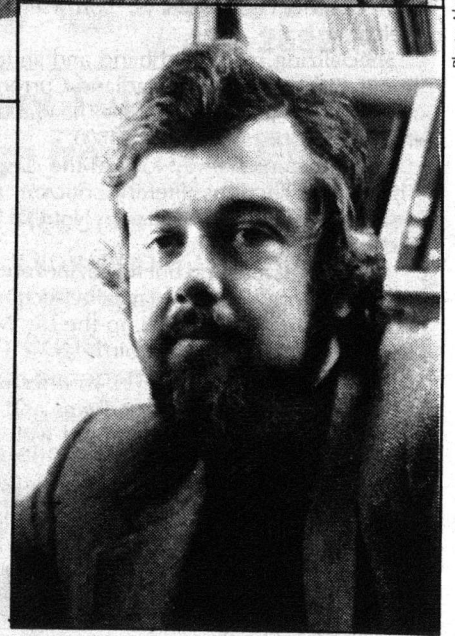


Photo: Alex Miller



(Above) Malcolm Forsyth leads class

(Below) John Armstrong

The New Music concert featuring works by student composers will be presented Sunday, March 16th in Convocation Hall. Free admission.

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For graduate composers, the instructor is there more in a supervisory role to respond and question the student's music. The student is put in the position to defend and explain his music. As in the sciences, the supervisor stays with the student every bit of the way to make sure that he does not go off on a tangent and do something that is academically not valid at this time.

Forsyth explains, "You can't write a thesis re-inventing the wheel. Neither can you, in music, rewrite something from the 18th century. It may be as good as anything written in that style, but it is not acceptable. The prevailing attitude today is that it is purely imitative and not creative work."

Therefore, the music that will be performed on Sunday will reflect the trends and attitudes of this century. If you have never experienced a New Music concert, you have your chance Sunday, 8 p.m. in Convocation Hall (old Arts Building). There will be a varied program presented ranging from haikus set to music (even one sung in Chinese) to a group effort composed by the Music 581 'Avant Garde Music' class

Student Help

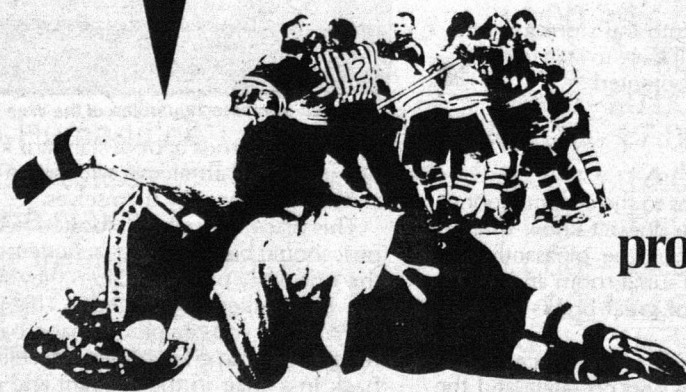
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SUB THEATRE
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