

## Nine-guitar band a sonic spectacle

By ADRIAN IWACHIW

Every aspiring teenage guitarist has some kind of dream: it might be to one day create an army of electric guitarists who, through their combined energies, could topple the modern equivalent of the walls of Jericho; or maybe the less ambitious aim of wedding the primal energy of heavy-metalloid punk rock with the grandiosity of classical music.

Glenn Branca has done both. In town at the Bam Boo (on Queen St. W.) Tuesday night, Branca's 10-man ensemble of electric guitarists (plus drummer) unmercifully descended like a battalion of thundering warplanes onto an audience of curious investigators, new wave trendies, and unsuspecting Queen St. regulars. From its atonal rhythmic beginnings, the opening piece (the final movement of Branca's *Symphony No. 4*) soon evolved into an awesome and overpowering sonic assault. The spectacle, however, wasn't "out there" on the stage; it took place in the audience's heads—a massive roar of harmonics and overtones created by the layered buildup of guitar chords, beneath which a steady beat pulsed through one's body, oscillating nerves, blood veins and interiors.

A 35-year-old New York-based composer/guitarist, Branca's musical background includes an equal combination of rock, the New York punk scene of the mid- to late-1970s, and avant-garde modernists like Penderecki and Ligeti. Appropriately, he's played in rock clubs as well as galleries and concert halls.

But the dichotomy between club and concert hall creates a conflict that's difficult to resolve; at the Bam Boo, the almost-religious dimension of the concert experience was spoiled by the management's practice of turning on loud music as soon as the band stopped playing. To add to the problem the power apparently failed at the end of the first piece (a long one); later, reportedly, the volume couldn't be made loud enough to satisfy Branca's standards.

So after an hour's break, the band came back onstage to play a short composition without amplification, fiercely throwing his body back and forth in time with the near-silent chords of the musicians. For the small fraction of the audience sitting on the floor near the stage, this provided an interesting philosophical twist—the energetic intensity of the performance didn't even need the sonic volume that filled the room in the first piece.

Unfortunately, for the majority of the audience, who could hardly hear the music (let alone see the stage over other people's heads), the second "set" didn't really



Glenn Branca

happen. Shouts like "Turn the amps on already," "These guys are good artists," and "I heard you were temperamental, but this is ridiculous" were heard regularly from the back, interfering with the concentrated intensity up front. When the band finished, disappointed mutterings could be heard; immediately, schmalzy music began playing over the speakers as the audience filed out, some appearing confused or disappointed, others amused.

Nevertheless, what was heard earlier was enough to get across the overwhelming visceral impact of Branca's music. Our century has seen a preoccupation with exploring all the possible extremes of musical expression (both in instrumentation and in feeling): from the massed violin glissandi of Xenakis' *Pithoprakta* or Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, to Gilbert Artman's *Urban Sax*, in which 24 saxophonists with gas masks and in factory-like settings create a hypnotic industrial-like hum.

Branca's music, in comparison, retains a strong sense of punk theatricality and tension, one that makes your body shake from the inside out, but also manages to attain heights of ecstatic grandeur.

If you really want to experience the fullness of life in the 1980s and you've never been to a heavy metal concert, Branca offers a much more exhilarating way to achieve the same result. Hopefully, next time around the concert setting will be more in accord with the demands of the music itself.

## Luncheon music delightful, entertaining

By DONALD M. SOLITAR

Stong College was host last Thursday to a concert of songs from Nineteenth Century Ontario given, *en costume*, by a lively quintet of performers consisting of Soprano Joan Wick Pelletier, Alto Cora Mickler Dusk (who accompanied herself occasionally on guitar), Tenor Geri Stephens, Baritone Hollis Rinehart, and Pianist and Autoharpist Mary Connelly. The period costumes were provided by nearby Black Creek Pioneer Village.

The 13 songs presented included Canadian originals, and Canadian versions of American Loyalist, English, or Scottish pieces composed in times ranging from the 17th century to 1899.

There was much Canadian history to be garnered from the lyrics of many of the songs. "Come All You Bold Canadians" (1812) celebrated a victory over the Americans in Detroit, "A Scarborough Settler's Lament" (1840) bemoaned a Scottish immigrant's homesickness for his native land, and "The Poor Little Girls of Ontario" (1890) told of broken courtships as the men moved west to the wilds of Manitoba, Winnipeg, and Saskatchewan.

Although there was some vocal roughness, the excellent acting of the performers, their obvious good humor, and their rapport with the audience (most of whom were from York University) made for a delightful and entertaining lunch time *divertissement*.

## Last chance!

The deadline for entries in the *Excalibur*/Calumet College Short Fiction Contest is Friday, December 9. Just submit your entries to the Arts Editor, *Excalibur*, 111 Central Square. See your entry in print and pick up \$100 if you're the winner. Judges: Don Coles, Frank Davey, Katharine Gauvier.

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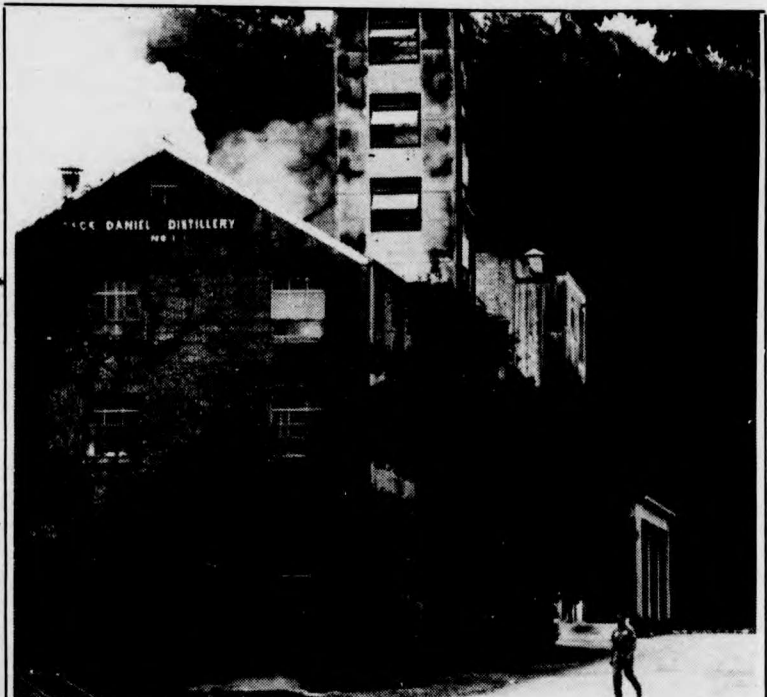
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