

York prof featured at U of T's Music in Space Concert

Electronic musicians explore their medium

By ADRIAN IWACHIW

The Space Age is a term currently undergoing an eclipse: one hears it less frequently than in the past as we concentrate more on down-to-earth problems. And yet, musical composers have been concerned with space, if not outer space (like Sun Ra and Anthony Braxton) then at least the space surrounding their audiences. Almost five centuries before the advent of stereophonic sound, composers in Venice were creating their own "antiphonal" stereo effects using widely-spaced church choirs.

In the past 30 years, the main seedbeds of spatial experimentation in music have been "electronic music" and the tape medium. Last Sunday's sold-out *Music in Space* concert at U of T's Hart House, probably the best attended of this season's New Music Concerts series, presented four recent works of electronic and live music that explore this dimension.

The highlight of the evening was the world premiere of York electronic music studio director and composition professor Phillip Warren's *Hurricaneum*. This was, in the composer's words, a "sonic play about forces and their effects," performed by seven musicians, conductor and electronic tape.

The 41-year-old Warren has taught at York since 1977. Prior to that he was composer-in-residence at Simon Fraser University. He studied composition and electronic music at Yale and Princeton, as well as in Poland and Germany, in the 1960s. Warren has composed electronic music for film, mime, dance and theatre.

His *Tellurian* premiered last year at the O'Keefe Centre as the musical partner to a ballet choreographed by Linda Rabin. Another music and dance work, *Pandora's Box* (for which Warren created a special box that colorfully lit up in intricate patterns), has been performed by Savannah Walling in Montreal, Winnipeg, and Regina and is soon to be taken to

Europe.

Hurricaneum—which was also presented yesterday afternoon at McLaughlin for those who missed it Sunday—follows Warren's tendency in recent years toward using strong tonal centres and diatonic scales. The core of the work, a section subtitled "The Eye" was built around a single chord, while a feeling of movement and breath was created by the simultaneous use of many different tunings, in effect creating "infrabeat structures in space." (The two pianos, for example, were each tuned an almost imperceptibly small interval apart).

The theatrical element of *Hurricaneum* was partially successful in suggesting the spiraling whirlwind forces supposedly being channeled through the musicians (in addition to providing an amusing spectacle). In their initial entrance, for example, the two percussionists, wearing dark sunglasses and Sony Walkmans made their way through the audience, slowly rotating and tapping the air around them with mallets. Later the other players also donned sunglasses and headphones; listening to their own personal tapes of earlier sections of the piece they played out of time with each other and out of contact with both the conductor (who left the players in feigned disgust) and the audience.

The resultant flurry of musical activity ("Leaving the Eye" and "Aftermath") maintained an overall form through its musical references to "the Eye." Throughout, *Hurricaneum* generated a sense of movement and energy, at times exhilarating in its rich and vibrant sonorous wash of sound.

Composer Warren feels a very strong bond with the Western art music tradition—this was obvious from the lovingly-quiet string trio opening suggestive of 19th Century pastoral English music. But he also recognizes the pervasive influence of technology in our day. "Everything's electronic music," says Warren. "When you think about it, every recording you've ever heard has been tampered with electronically." Some basic understanding of this is necessary for composers in our age, Warren maintains.

Technology has also freed music from the fixed positioning of the performer on stage, allowing it to move around in space.

Consequently, electronic music can become a kind of invisible "architecture in time." Warren says he directs his students towards an appreciation of the sculptural possibilities of sounds in space as well as the textural and sonic possibilities of analog and digital technology.

The three other works performed at Sunday night's concert concentrated on acoustic, instrumental sounds, both live and prerecorded. The piece that, according to organizers, initially attracted much of the audience, was Steve Reich's "Vermont Counterpoint": twelve minutes of intricately rhythmic, kaleidoscopic, delicate flute patterns, with flutist and artistic director of the New Music Concert series Robert Aitken playing a solo flute line in tandem with ten prerecorded flute, alto flute and piccolo parts. One may wonder why the live performer was necessary at all, if his contribution consisted in merely reproducing a part that could have easily been prerecorded with the others. Nevertheless, Reich's familiar lightly-pulsating musical patterns, though more concentrated and precise than in past works, provoked a drugless, meditative high, enhanced somewhat by the almost cathedral-like ambience of the hall.

Canadian composers Jan Jarvlepp and John Rea revealed a similar interest in multi-leveled patterns and rhythmic correspondences, though their pieces utilized larger groups of musicians. In Jarvlepp's "Time Zones," "traditional melody and harmony don't exist at all" according to the composer, "but are replaced by an interest in dissimilar temporal relationships and their resulting 'friction.'" The 17 musicians were spaced at various locations throughout the hall, presumably relationships could be heard by all, though this hardly redeemed the work from its academic tedium.

Rea's "Treppenmusik" ("staircase music") was an impressionistic musical portrayal of a world built according to the graphic artist M.C. Escher. Symmetrical patterns, canonic repetitions, ascending and descending loops, cascading spirals and unexpected metamorphoses added up to a child's playground of kaleidoscopic pleasures. "Treppenmusik" was at times quite delightful, but for the most part, like "Time Zones," it suffered from a lack of form and direction.

Dancer just wants to create

By LINDA JANASZ

"If I stopped creating I would die. If this was just a dream, then nothing would happen. You must be willing to fight, work and sweat for what you want."

In 1973, Paul-Andre Fortier made a choice—to become a dancer. He had received his bachelor's degree in Literature and was teaching at a college in Quebec, but decided to put dancing before academia. Now, at 35, Fortier has one of Canada's most renowned avant-garde dance companies.

"I now express my creativity through dance," he says. "It is only another form of communication; it is something alive."



Fortier

"I shock them and make them laugh. It is through body movement that the audience 'feels' what I am putting across to them. Human beings are always, changing. We fight against that change on one hand, and want it on another. When we're afraid of the new, we go back to traditional values."

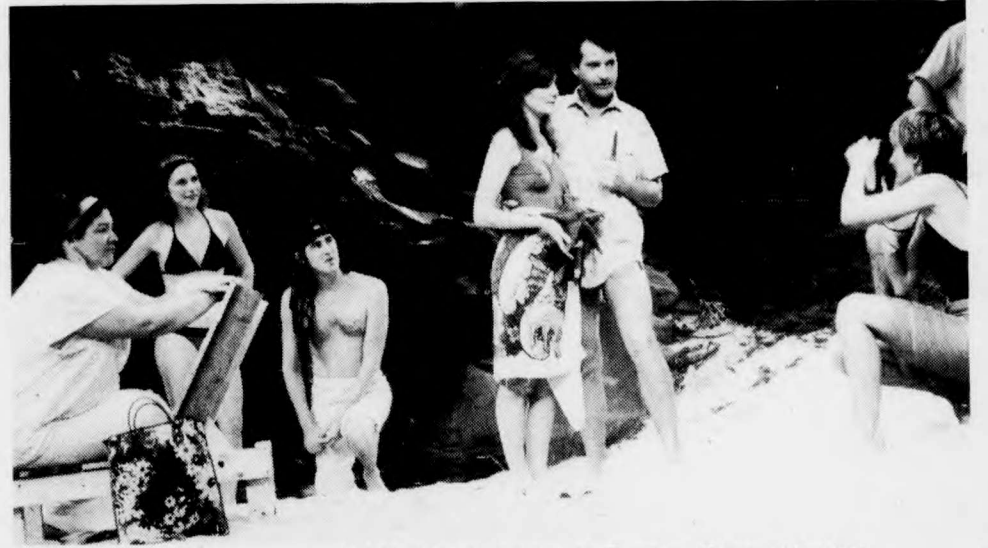
In 1981, Fortier won the prestigious Chalmers Award for Choreography. At the time, the founding chairman of York University's dance department said that Fortier's work was "very strong, explicit and sexual—almost disturbing—but also remarkably clear, theatrical and original." Fortier believes that there is much tension that exists within our society. "Through my work I explore this theme. I try to put my finger on it. Sometimes it tickles, sometimes it hurts."

After Fortier's decision to become a dancer in 1973, he dedicated most of his time to this pursuit. He studied at the Les Grandes Ballet Canadiens then worked as a dancer for seven years. "I was able to make dancing my sole professional endeavor. Also, I was very fortunate to do something that I truly loved."

In 1980, he began his own company. Since that time, they have toured Europe, Canada and parts of South America. Fortier also spent a year in Paris working with Michel Caserta and dancing the leading role in *Visage de sable*. Since that time, the troupe took part in the Okanada Festival in Berlin and last October traveled to Mexico where they performed in Mexico's international Cervantino Festival.

"I know that I am very fortunate that I did not start dancing until I was in my 20s. I do not embrace the traditional values. Therefore, this is an experiment with body movement. You see, I really started at zero."

Fortier Dance-Creation will be performing at the Winchester Street Theatre through Saturday at 8 p.m., with a 2 p.m. matinee Sunday. Tickets at the 5 Star Ticket Booth (Dundas and Yonge) or call 967-1365.



Actors whoop it up on set of *O.D. on Paradise*, at Theatre Passe Muraille

O.D. yes, but paradise it's not

O.D. on Paradise
Theatre Passe Muraille
Closes March 11

By JASON SHERMAN

The first thing that's difficult to understand about *O.D. on Paradise* is how—in the name of all that's sensible—it won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best New Play of 1983. The second is why has Theatre Passe Muraille gone to all the trouble of bringing the outside inside when the play would work just as badly in a non-natural setting? The third is why anyone would find it funny or touching or metaphoric or any of the other things it tries to unsuccessfully to be.

O.D. on Paradise is less a play than a series of interlocked skits about eight Torontonians vacationing in Jamaica. Unfortunately, all that holds the scenes together are the characters—we might as well be watching a three-hour *Love Boat*. There are four couples who all have problems dealing with each other and with themselves, but there is nothing new or even interesting about any of the conflicts. One character is ambitious; another, anxious; another, conscientious, and so on. Each has one or two speeches to reveal his or her problem, and through the course of the second act, all are solved in one way or another.

The central conflict seems to involve Vic, a daddy's boy of about 30 who has come with his wife, father, and step-mother to unwind. This is supposed to be something like dramatic irony because while he's unwinding everyone else is getting uptight.

But Vic seems to be the central character only because the play's amateurish symbolism is most analogous to his struggle. He wants to attain "manhood," we suppose. Near the start he finds a conch which, we are told, instinctively crawls forth into the hot sun and burns to death—so Vic kills it. Oooh, wonder if *that's* foreshadowing anything.

After this, neat imagery is invoked again and again, until Vic's epitaph: "He just burned up." Equally silly is the parade of phallic symbols in Vic's hands—a knife, a bamboo shoot, even a snorkel and goggle can't escape the over-attentive eyes of the writers. If all this means Vic is a man, little else in the play is concerned with his epiphany, and his death makes no sense whatsoever.

The first step for co-writers Linda Griffiths and Patrick Brymer is reducing the number of characters and making the remaining ones interesting. The second is to make some sense of this nonsense that jumps from story to story, from public outcry to individual angst, from (not very funny) comedy to (not very good) melodrama. Third, they should forget the whole thing, return their award and make a public apology.

As should director Clarke Rogers, who has undone himself yet again. The play claims to run on Jamaican time, which might be slow, but certainly not as slow as the the stage time of this production. At times the slow pacing could be forgiven as an attempt to transplant Chekhovian non-action to a more topical location, but the closest *O.D.* comes to Chekhov is in making the audience squirm in their seats, and that from the unnecessarily raised temperatures in the theatre.

The acting isn't much help, either. Layne Coleman is as dull and non-present as he was when he tried to destroy Hamlet a couple months back. There seems to be a one-man Layne Coleman Fan Club at Passe Muraille, who cries "bravo" after his opening night performances. This opening didn't need it, because there was enough maudlin self-congratulation during the curtain call to make applause redundant.

If there is anything positive to say about *O.D. on Paradise*, about its script, its production, or its relevance, it has been left out by those responsible. A shameful waste of effort and money.