

DAVID TUDOR SYMPOSIUM AT THE GETTY

The first international symposium on the work of American musical pioneer David Tudor (1926-1996) took place from May 17-19, 2001 in Los Angeles, CA. Organized by the Getty Research Institute in collaboration with the California Institute of the Arts, the two days and three nights of events brought together visual artists, composers, and musicians who worked closely with Tudor as well as professors, authors, and the just plain curious.

The symposium began with a bang...and a squeak...and a thump...with a three and a half hour continuous performance of Tudor's "Rainforest IV"—an electroacoustic environment realized by the ensemble "Composers Inside Electronics." In this collaboration/installation set-up, the composers designed and constructed sculptures, - many of which were suspended—that functioned as loudspeakers. Each performer sends an audio signal to the sculpture and it, in turn, vibrates thru the use of an electromagnetic transducer. The vibrations are then sent thru one or more pick-ups attached to the sculpture to a bank of audio equipment under the control of each composer/performer who modifies the sound in very subtle ways. Being an "environment", one could walk freely— even touch, crawl around, literally envelope oneself in a particular sound—all with the curiosity of a youngster in an aural playpen.

Concurrent with "Rainforest IV" was an informal panel discussion about David Tudor's working methods, his role as a teacher, performer, composer, and friend. The panel was an impressive group of friends and collaborators such as Jean Rigg, longtime friend of Tudor's who managed the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1968-1976 and helped complete the transfer of the complete Tudor archive to the Getty; Billy Kluver, an electrical engineer who, with Robert Rauschenberg, founded the collaborative organization, Experiments in Art and Technology; Jackie Monnier, granddaughter of Henri Matisse, and assistant to her stepfather Marcel Duchamp on the assemblage of his "Boite-en-Valise," and close collaborator with Tudor on mixed-media installations involving kites; Gordon Mumma, composer, performer with the Cunningham Dance Company and co-founder with Robert Ashley of the Cooperative Studio for Electronic Music in Ann Arbor, Michigan; composer and performer Pauline Oliveros who was associated with the San Francisco Tape Music Center and directed the Center for Music Experiment at the University of California, San Diego and Christian Wolff, a composer who studied with John Cage and joined fellow members of the "New York

School," Cage, Earle Brown, and Morton Feldman, in exploring graphic notation and indeterminacy in the early '50s.

Much of the next two days were spent trying to make "sense" of Tudor's work thru talks given by various speakers who felt that they needed to explain the hows and whys of Tudor's genius. The various sessions covered aspects of interpretation, collaboration, composition, and performance that even the most devoted admirer would be hard-pressed to conceive. Beginning on the first full day, ideas of "controlled liberation", "comparative indeterminacy", and a particularly bizarre attempt at corporeal investigations of Tudor as a psychological manipulator and creator of assured attempts of musical "violence" were presented—and all that before lunchtime! The sessions continued in that manner with all of the ups and downs one would expect in presenting such "investigations" of Tudor's work.

Evenings followed with concerts of rarely heard works by important musical mavericks and pioneers for pianos, electronics, and performance "actions." As you approached the concert hall, on view in the lobby was a six-channel DVD installation by filmmaker Molly Davies called "David Tudor's Ocean"— an intimate look at Tudor setting up and performing his electronic score, "Soundings: Ocean Diary," with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in Amsterdam in 1994.

Once comfortably seated in the beautiful and acoustically superb Harold M. Williams Auditorium at the Getty Center, one was treated to works by George Brecht, Michael von Biel, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Jerry Hunt, LaMonte Young, as well as David Tudor himself and exquisite performances by performer/composers Ron Kuivila, Vicki Ray, David Rosenboom, and Mark Traylor.

Amazing music, good company, and beautiful weather all came together to create a wonderful weekend. Yes, there were some "difficult" moments during the examinations of Tudor's working style, but the positive aspects of such exchanges result in creating more questions—questions that one can transfer to other artistic disciplines as well as to life itself.

—Rod Stasick