



Of the many stories John Cage tells about pianist/composer David Tudor, this one from **Silence** sounds the most vividly characteristic:

Cage and Tudor had each received a box of oriental spices and foods from India, but the spice containers had come open in shipping, and the contents were inextricably, it seemed, mixed up. Cage put his box away and forgot about it. "David Tudor, on the other hand, set to work. Assembling bowls of various sizes, sieves of about eleven various-sized screens, a pair of tweezers, and a small knife, he began a process which lasted three days, at the end of which time each spice was separated from each other, each kind of bean from each other, and the palm sugar lumps had been scraped free of spice and excavations in them had removed embedded beans. He then called me up to say, 'Whenever you want to get at that box of spices you have, let me know. I'll help you.'"

It was that patient meticulousness, applied to the confused and intricate details of post-World War II music, that has shaped David Tudor's entire career. On the one hand, his ability to extract clarity from the most tortuously complex rhythms made him the interpreter par excellence of the piano music of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez; Tudor's American premiere of the latter's Piano Sonata no. 2 in 1950 established his reputation as the leading avant-garde pianist of the period. On the other hand, it was also Tudor who brought definition and integrity to the chance-oriented music of American composers in the 50s: presented by Earle Brown or Morton Feldman with a score of graphs, squiggles, lines, curves, and no conventional musical notation to speak of, Tudor would carefully notate every detail of his own musical realization. Every writer on the subject agrees: music between 1950 and 1965, on both sides of the Atlantic, would have taken a very different path had it been denied the pianistic abilities and dedication of David Tudor.

A list of important piano works premiered by David Tudor (many of them written specifically for him) would exceed the length of the present article. In the early 50s he played at festivals at Darmstadt and Donaueschingen, creating much excitement and a number of scandals with the aleatory works of Cage, Christian Wolff, and others. In the following years Tudor became a staunch advocate of the

music of Stockhausen, who wrote his monumental **Klavierstück XI** for Tudor to premiere in New York. In August of 1952, Tudor even walked on to a stage in Woodstock, New York, and calmly sat in front of a piano without playing for four and a half minutes: it was the world premiere of Cage's "silent sonata," **4'33"**. Since then, Tudor has toured widely providing both piano and electronic accompaniment to Cage's readings and the dances of Merce Cunningham.

In a way, though, it was Tudor's meticulous concern for sounds that eventually drew him away from piano, and he has not played regularly since 1970. "I had put a lot of creative effort into drawing sounds out of the piano," Tudor, 60 this year, theorizes from his home in Stony Point, New York. "I wanted to continue creating sounds, and the sounds of the piano weren't enough. I needed to hear something else. So the piano sort of fell away, I didn't really make a decision to quit. In 1964 I became serious about my work as a composer, and I gave my last major concert in 1969."

It is relatively common for performers of new music to one day think, "I could write this," declare themselves composers, and then launch into careers of well-deserved obscurity. Such was not Tudor's pattern. Just as his accompaniment of dance and theatrical happenings had led naturally to his involvement with electronics in performance, so the step from performing on electronic components to creating with them was a simple and natural one. Tudor's works grow, after all, from the intrinsic possibilities of the custom-made components he uses. "My composing consists of discovering what the process is capable of doing, and what I consider its character. It's a time art. I try to find out what possibilities are set up in the circuitry, and to ensure that those are realized somewhere within the performance, though at what time they'll occur varies from one performance to another."

One of Tudor's most spectacular and celebrated works has been **Rainforest**, a large electroacoustic environmental work assembled in connection with his composition/performance group Composers Inside Electronics - Tudor is a firm believer in collaboration and group composition. **Rainforest** comprises, in its

several versions, a roomful of various sculptures - metal hoops, pyramids, strips of metal, even huge industrial cans - suspended from the ceiling, all attached to a complex network of wire and contact microphones. The audience is invited to walk around among the sculptures, touch them ("some children even like to bite them"), and listen to the glittering forest of steely sounds that emanate from this strange assemblage.

**Rainforest** was yet another of the pipe dreams that **New Music America '82** had hoped to bring to Chicago and failed due to the enormous expense involved. For four years, though, one of the festival's directors, Peter Gena, has been trying to bring David Tudor here for his first solo performance (he's played here only with Cunningham), and it finally looks as though he's succeeded. Tuesday night, sponsored by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where Gena teaches in the sound department, Tudor will present his 1985 work **Hedgehog**, a work similar in conception to **Rainforest**, but with smaller forces.

"A 'hedgehog' is just a metal broom, an instrument commonly used years ago by the chimney sweeps," Tudor explains. "I bought mine in France, at a hardware store. I've since found out that you can get them here, but you don't see them much anymore. Everything's done with plastic these days."

"In the piece, the hedgehog is just an object that's hanging in space. Sound is sent through it, so that it's in a state of vibration. I pick up those vibrations and process them with a series of about 40 components (including filters, gates, and other sound modifiers, including a percussion synthesizer). The sound goes around as in a feedback loop, it's a mode of using the feedback process." What kind of sounds does he use as input? "It doesn't matter what goes into it. The end result doesn't resemble what is put into the object."

David Tudor will perform **Hedgehog** Tuesday night at 7 PM in the performance space at the School of the Art Institute, Columbus at Jackson. For further information, call 443-3743. Admission is free, but seating is limited; this is a long-awaited premiere for one of new music's living legends, and the word to the wise is that early arrival would be a smart move.

- Kyle Gann

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