

Joshua Fried, who sometimes drops his surname depending on the venue's brow level, two-stepped through several of his electronic rock songs at King Tut's Wah Wah Hut in the wee hours of January 14. His medium, like that of Terry Riley and Steve Reich in the early days, is the tape loop, but his focuses are form and dance rhythm, not perception. He's working with four, sometimes six (sounded like more) prerecorded tracks, though he gives them to you in installments, bringing two in, taking one out, revealing a brief, multifaceted musical object a little bit at a time. In short, he draws tremendous variety from a tiny amount of material.

Fried's music probably has more to do with Jamaican dub than with the European avant-garde, but his playing method, moving sliders to change levels on prerecorded material, reminds me of Stockhausen students like Jean-Claude Eloy who used to hover over mixers to present an illusion of improvisatory control. Rather than sit there zombielike, though, Fried shapes the music in a frenzy of attacks, cutoffs, and reprises. Sometimes he turns to drum with fingers or sticks on the heels of a quartet of upturned shoes, in which he's installed piezoelectric disks connected to gates that, when activated, bring in additional noise. That noise might have political content, which the drumming distorts with strobe-like effect. Here, for example, George Bush's "and God bless the United States of America" became something like "an... d bles... Unit... ates of... ica," a transformation over which Fried's shoe tree exerts fluid control.

Given the derivation of everything you hear from one eight- or 16-beat pattern that isn't always present, Fried's paradigm is the passacaglia, a Baroque form diffracted through satisfyingly low-brow '60s technology for a very '90s sound. The rhythmic limitations of such a trick are

Joshua Fried / Aki Takahashi

## In the Loops

BY KYLE GANN



Takahashi: three works from Japan and one Good Old American piano piece

extreme, of course, but he runs a maze through the material with such sure-footed showmanship that you're not aware of them. Nor is he too artsy to charm a drinking crowd. He's the son, after all, of Gerald Fried, author of the *It's About Time* theme song, who used to write scores for *Gilligan's Island* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* What Joshua seems to have picked up from his father is the good sense to know that music must entertain before it can also do something more.

Some 17 hours later at the other end of the Lexington line, Japan's premier avant-garde pianist Aki Takahashi offered an enormously dissimilar program at the Asia Society. (Concede transition failure at once, maybe you'll get away with it.) The surprisingly mellow repertoire nearly bypassed any demonstration of Takahashi's phenomenal rhythmic and digital virtuosity, and of the three works by her countrymen, two demonstrated that the New Tonality has

taken firmer root in Japan than I had been led to believe.

The weakest offering was Mamoru Fujieda's *Kyrie Resounded I*, and not only because Takahashi's partner, clarinetist William Blount, couldn't match her for tone, phrasing, or even tempo. A 33-year-old University of California at San Diego graduate, Fujieda set a flat clarinet line of modulating arpeggios against moody, Messiaenish chords on the piano, and sounded too much like those composers who think that, to write a minimalist piece, you write a regular piece and insert repeat signs. *The Auroras of Autumn* by Aki's celebrated brother Yuji Takahashi was harder-edged than its title connoted, at least in his sister's hands. This was in a spare, diatonic idiom, beginning with merely one line, later adding a quiet bass ostinato, quickly repeated perfect fourths, and melodies in parallel multiple octaves. It had the same bell-like charm as some of Cage's early works, and was as meandering as Yuji's earlier piece for Aki, homonymously entitled *Maeander*.

Conductor Paul Zukovsky and the Music from Japan Chamber Orchestra joined Takahashi in a Concertino for Piano and 16 Instrumentalists by Japan's elder statesman Yoritsune Matsudaira. Though born in 1907, Matsudaira's work was couched in a serialist/gestural style more typical of younger Europeans. Its orchestration was colorful, with spiky piano-xylophone-harp trios and sharp string chords that evoked the Chinese mouth organ, but were not unusual by Boulezian standards. What made it distinctive was that the second and third movements emulated Gagaku with a slow, soft pulse in the drums, giving the myriad woodwind and piano flurries something to bounce off of. Dated 1989, the piece could hardly have been well-rehearsed, though the ragged edges implicated neither soloist nor conductor.

To *Jornada del Muerto* (Journey of the Dead One) by Santa Fe composer Peter Garland, Takahashi brought a cool, unromantic reading, but one of great breadth and dynamic range. Named for the place in New Mexico where the first atomic bomb was dropped, this is a gentle pentatonic sonata with octave melodies straight out of the Good Old American

## MUSIC

School of piano writing. Garland's experimentalism takes place more along expressive lines than technical ones, closer to Lou Harrison and Henry Cowell's Celtic mode than to anything west of the Rockies. In the hemiola lullaby "Landscape of Silence and Stone," the proximity of the relative minor powerfully evokes the presence of death. Garland's overall strategy is to spin beautiful, nonrepetitive melodies from permutations of simple motives spread across the keyboard, and in this respect the movements are almost identical. "Contrast," you'll remember, "is for people who can't write music." ■

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