

If you remember the '60s, you weren't there," said La Monte Young in the middle of a persuasive demonstration that we *don't* remember the '60s. Or at least we haven't yet. The context was three memorial events presented by Young and the MELA Foundation at Dia Art Foundation, May 9, 16, and 23, honoring three of Young's old cronies: Richard Maxfield, Angus MacLise, and Terry Jennings. Musically, the three could hardly have been more diverse, but their personal similarities were striking. All three had had difficulty dealing with the music world's harsher realities, and all three died drug-related deaths, Maxfield at 42 (leaping from a window), Jennings and MacLise at 41. On one level these "concerts" were just Young playing tapes by old friends (there were a few re-created performances), but they revealed a tip of a subculture which hasn't yet entered the era's official history.

Cage claims that the secret of fame is longevity, and the obscurity of these three figures points up what disastrous

## MUSIC

PR it is to die too soon. Maxfield's name sticks in a few memories; one of the early gizmo whizzes, he took over Cage's class at the New School for Social Research, and is listed in *Grove* as America's first electronic music teacher. The gradually evolving wave-form processes of his one commercially recorded work, *Night Music* (Odyssey), create the impression he was a protominimalist, but the other tape pieces Young played were quite different. In *Sine Music*, *Trinity Piece*, *Cough Music*, and others, Maxfield arranged unusual sounds—*Cough Music*, for example, used coughs he edited out of a Christian Wolff piece—on bits of tape drawn at random, throwing back any whose effect on the continuity he didn't like.

The resulting music (some of which

Maxfield / MacLise / Jennings

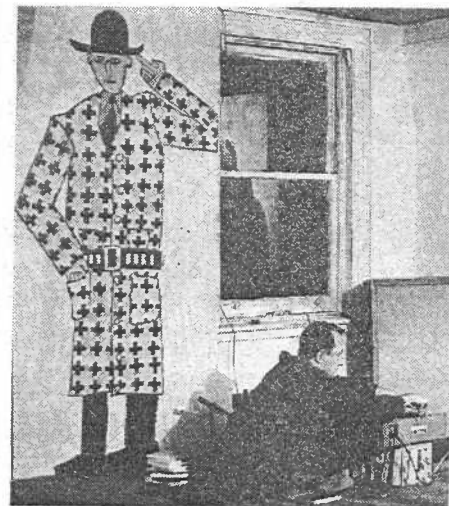
# Les Tapes Perdu

BY KYLE GANN

Advance Recordings has just released on cassette) was serene and complexly textured, if inevitably dated by its electronic whooshes. Joseph Kubera's re-creation of Maxfield's *Piano Concert* for David Tudor sounded fresher, for Kubera had enlisted Tudor's direction for the sake of a sparkingly authentic performance. Accompanied by taped noises, Kubera dropped marbles and buttons on the piano strings, scraped the strings with a rubber mallet (held at an angle specified by Tudor), and finally crawled beneath the instrument to beat it with hammers.

Spontaneity played a large part in the aesthetics of all three composers, and I'm sorry Young omitted a tape he played for me before the concert: a Maxfield-directed improvisation whose sparse, soloistic style would have sounded at home at Roulette today. MacLise (1938-79) was more poet than composer, but he was a dazzling percussionist with a background in Haitian drumming and a technique often likened to the sound of rain. His delicate improvisations on cembalom (a hammered stringed instrument) anticipated by decades a type of modal, ethnic-flavored improv common today.

Jennings (1940-81) has survived primarily as one of the most intriguing entries in Young's *An Anthology*, first issued in 1963 and now a collector's item. As a youth I was much taken with Jennings's 1960 string quartet, whose score contains 43 notes played over 28 minutes; this concert provided my first opportunity to hear the piece live, rendered with devotion by Jeffrey Lee and Melissa Kleinbart on violins, Ah Ling Neu on



Maxfield, 1964: gizmo whiz

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viola, and Charles Curtis on cello. The first chord, an E and two Bs, lasted a minute and 35 seconds, then a lone C# lasted 50 seconds, and of the various tutti rests, one was over two minutes.

Both this and the slowly sustained *Piano Piece* 1958 showed a strong affinity with Morton Feldman's music, but the senses of both time and pitch diverged markedly. Feldman's habitual feeling of a slow, breathlike beat is absent in Jennings's music, replaced with the quantitative, stationary time-sense that Young's music had in that period as well. The score revealed that the 1958 piece was 12-tone; by 1961 Jennings was experimenting with extremely drawn-out boogie-woogie (not unlike what Robert Ashley and "Blue" Gene Tyranny have done

more recently). Within those three years one might pinpoint the juncture at which 12-tone music, jazz, and minimalism merged in a cross-fertilization whose effects we're still reeling from. In his boogying *Tune in E*, Jennings wailed on sax while Young pounded relentless keyboard changes with a stamina I haven't heard equaled by anyone more recent.

Jennings's mid-'60s music was my favorite of the series. Young ran out of time before he could play *Winter Trees*, but its companion piano solo *Winter Sun* contains even fewer notes than the *Quartet*. On tape, however, Jennings departs from the page into a jazzy, cyclic improv which contains the unmistakable germ of Harold Budd's West Coast minimalism. AMM's John Tilbury played second piano on *Winter Trees*, and Musica Elettronica Viva's Richard Teitelbaum was a friend of Jennings. Such associations point to an unacknowledged crucial role in the development of free improv.

In between works, a panel of old friends of the composers (plus, at two concerts, myself as abashed token youngster) offered abundant personal insights. The musicians who remembered the trio transformed what could have been dull evenings of old tapes into warm memorials that enticed even newcomers to stay for four hours; Tudor, in the audience, waved off questions about Maxfield because he had known him too well in his depressing last years. The concerts also reminded us that no century has been as pregnant with alternative histories as the 20th. Generally, the '60s were a time of systems and impersonal processes, and to uncover a "school" of composers so dedicated to intuition suggests an intriguing revisionist view. Young's storehouse of astonishing tapes, many made at Yoko Ono's loft concerts, deserves a permanent archive. If history alters our view of the '60s as much as it has the 19th century, Jennings and Maxfield could take a place among their chaotic era's most imposing figures. ■

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