

Here is the complete text, since the online version obscured some of the words with ads:

Pop Goes the Composer

By Kyle Gann

Eve Beglarian and Friends Explore an Audio-Visual Vernacular
April 16, 2002

It's a long way from the halls of the Princeton and Columbia music departments to the pop music stage, and Eve Beglarian has traveled most of that route. Her music has always been brassy, intelligent, and outside the box, but in her early days she wasn't above filling her otherwise tonal chamber pieces with hairy, Milton Babbitt-type rhythmic structures. From there she quickly slid into collage and performance art, usually performing her own music by speaking the text or playing keyboard. Now, however, in two works-in-progress called **Book of Days** and **How to Play the Tambourine** that she showcased March 27 at Galapagos, she's completed the 180 degree-turn to singing her own pop songs.

And that raises a question: can a composer become a pop artist? Or is Beglarian's music too intelligent, her artistic control too evident, to complete the illusion of spontaneity and vulnerability the pop singer needs? That's putting it too starkly, because she had a number of agendas running at Galapagos, and in fact, that's part of the issue: Beglarian's simple-seeming music operates on multiple levels. Here she augmented her own creativity with music, lyrics, and visuals by three young composers she's been working with - Corey Dargel, Cory Arcangel, and Ray Sweeten - proving that there is a hip, younger Downtown scene out there. Elements were too mixed in this gig to quite sort out what was what, but **Book of Days** is an ongoing series of videos with music, one for each day of the year; **How to Play the Tambourine** seems to be a set of songs.

Dargel was the most obviously simpatico Beglarian collaborator, for his songs' witty lyrics over sweetly synthesized accompaniments are like hers in texture, though his delivery is more deadpan. A postmodernist looking at the pop song from the outside, he turns irony upside down. Rather than subvert a sincere surface message, he wore all his self-conscious distancing on his sleeve, but underneath you began to suspect he rather heartbreakingly meant what he sang: "the folks down at the plant are lying / they say the smoke won't give you cancer / but all our friends are dying / and this time love is not the answer...."

Arcangel's primary contributions were some video work and a demonstration of a hot-wired video game. As he explained in a Power Point lecture to riotous response from the 20-somethings in the crowd, it's not difficult to remove the circuitry from an old Super Mario Brothers Nintendo game cartridge and insert your own modified circuits. His proof, a game called "I Shot Andy Warhol," challenged audience members to shoot at images of Warhol in various scenarios, while being careful to miss similar figures representing the Pope, Flavor Flav, and Colonel Sanders.

Sweeten provided remixes, a genre whose premises I may be too old to appreciate. For instance, saxophonist Taimur Sullivan played an early Beglarian piece from the 1980s, *Michael's Spoon*: a lovely, slow melody of long sax tones over faster synthesized patterns of flowing, mellow harmonies. Afterward, Sweeten's *Michael's Spoon Remix* put Beglarian's beautiful piece through god knows what electronic modifications, reducing it to a merely pleasant continuum of indistinct low tones laced with scratchy noises. All of Sweeten's pieces were similarly vague but soothing.

The final pop song, "Good Deal Easier", brought the whole crowd together to sing feel-good lyrics: "and we'll stop smoking indoors / and laugh a little louder outside / we can shop without knowing what for / and try things we've never tried." It was free and fun and joyous, but it didn't hit me as hard as an earlier Beglarian song called "Five Things," based on an ancient Chinese text. In that piece, Margaret Lancaster on flute and Sullivan on sax hit away at repeated notes and bito22Ánal melodies in between Beglarian's spoken phrases, which were also eventually projected on the screen:

"What has been long neglected cannot be restored immediately," she intoned. "Ills that have been accumulating for a long time cannot be cleared away immediately." A few moments later, "One cannot enjoy oneself forever.... Human emotions cannot be just.... Calamity cannot be avoided by trying to run away from it." And finally, "Anyone who has realized these five things can be in the world without misery." That's what makes Beglarian's potential status as a pop singer questionable: she can go through the motions, but the power of her music comes not primarily from her persona, but from the much larger things she's tapped into.



EDUCATION

Pop Goes the Composer

by VILLAGE VOICE

April 9, 2002



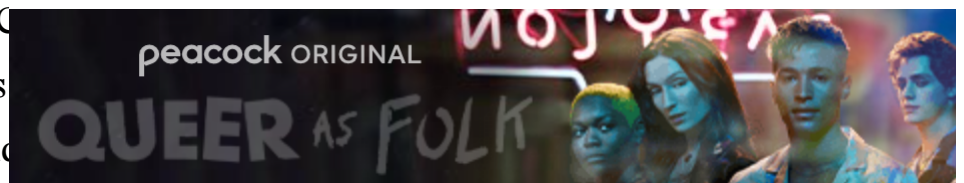
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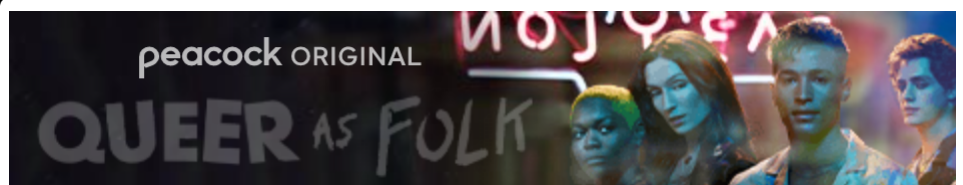
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