

Some critic with higher-than-average psychic powers should have predicted the reemergence of the accordion. To the romantics it was "an instrument in harmony with the sentiments of an assassin" (Ambrose Bierce), but now that music has moved back from classical phrasing toward medieval/Eastern drone and continuum, its drawbacks have become assets. Composers are realizing that it does many of the things the synthesizer was invented to do, with far more naturalness. You can use your voice-editing software to program 50 nuances of attack and decay on the same basic sound, create a sequencer track to synchronize them, then become slave to a computer click—or you can hire an accordionist. Judging from recent and upcoming activity, there are plenty around. Guy Klucevsek, the archetypal "new accordionist," played at the Whitney's Philip Morris space June 8, and Avery Fisher Hall's "Serious Fun" series devoted the evening of July 22 to "The Big Squeeze," a potpourri of accordion genres.

The Big Squeeze" was emceed by Pamela Sue Carlberg, Miss Indiana of 1981, whose talent act had been accordion, and who dazzled the audience with not only her virtuosity, but her first-trip-to-the-big-city wholesomeness. Squeezebox practitioners can't yet seem comfortable on the highbrow side of the line dividing bar mitzvahs and concerts, and some felt a need to surround the instrument with a buffer of humor. William Schimmel, sporting a mop on his head to connote "longhair," waded between vaudeville and surreality in a routine with his dancer/wife Micki Goodman that revolved around Mozart's C Minor Fantasy. The B. Z. Squeezies, comprising Zeena Parkins and Billy Swindler on accordions and Hearn Gadbois on hand drums, ran through a medley of ethnic styles, inserting a wry arrangement of Michael Jackson's "Beat It." The finale came with Terrence Simien and the Mal-

let Playboys, a rousing zydeco band from Louisiana. Simien's accordion was inaudible in the roar of guitars, but the group pulled off the notable achievement of getting upper-class white people to dance in the aisles of Avery Fisher Hall.

I was dubious as to how a crowd primed for polkas and zydeco would react to the drones and breathing meditations of Pauline Oliveros, introduced by Miss Indiana as "Paula" as though this were the eccentric old lady's first shot at the big time. Oliveros calculated her crowd well, though, and while *The Roots of the*

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Moment was less infectious than her ensemble music, it created an irresistible mystical ambience. Justly tuned accordion and electronics were indistinguishably mixed, and as she began to squeeze, one at first heard only the sounds of breathing; then wisps of melody emerged and quietly melted into a cloud of repeating figures. As lonely as a Texas prairie, it was the most ethereal and sensitive Oliveros performance I'd heard, and, as usual, a benediction.

In Oliveros's meditative aesthetic, the accordion seems an extension of her lungs; it's Klucevsek who sculpts the instrument into a medium. The first wide-ranging explorer in the virgin field of avant-garde accordion, Klucevsek fully exploits the luxury of reinterpreting the entire history of ideas through his instrument. *Scenes From a Mirage*, performed at both concerts and included on Klucev-

'Serious Fun'
Squeezed To Meetcha

BY KYLE GANN



Guy Klucevsek

sek's beautiful album of the same title (Review), drew variations on a mournful theme with Beethovenian attention to harmonic structure and figuration; even the use of range, thinning into the highest notes in the finale, recalled the master's Op. 111 Sonata. *The Old Woman Who Dances With the Sea* wore a haunting melody over an accompaniment of Satieque simplicity, and *The Flying Pipe Organ* (at the Whitney) floated masses of sound in a continuum more evanescent than the Ligeti works that established the genre. Klucevsek's unpretentious works are so closely geared to the instrument, though, and his melodic sense so secure, that they sound entirely his own.

Flying Pipe Organ, in particular, showed off the beauty of his tone, which, though rich and voluminous, is as delicate and subtle as the Chinese sheng or Laotian khene.

Klucsek is also a generous interpreter and commissioner of other people's music, and at the Whitney he played a sampling of "Polka From the Fringe," a collection of polkas scheduled for performance at BAM this November. As with C.F. Peters's "Waltz Collection," the virtuosic creativity composers exhibit when forced into a severely limiting discipline is always refreshing. Peter Garland's *The Club Nada Polka* loped along with a southwestern swagger. Steve Elson's *From Here to Paternity Polka* played with sudden accents and wrong notes in funny bitonality, William Duckworth's *Polking Around* spun a smooth process from five-measure phrases, and Fred Frith's *Disinformation Polka* added and subtracted notes in an eerie melody as suspicious as its title. Only Joseph Kainkas had researched the form's Polish roots enough to create a charmingly authentic specimen.

One of the most unusual pieces Klucsek played at the Whitney was Anthony Coleman's *Below 14th Street Above 125th Street*. In most music, the melodic changes while its context stays the same, but Coleman hears form from a different angle than other people, and turned convention inside out. Over and over, Klucsek intoned the "Muss es sein" motive from Beethoven's last quartet, surrounding it at first with somber harmonies, then moving through dissonant chromaticism to agitated furries of crotchets. Full of trills and the virtuosic effects at which Klucsek excels, it modernized a kind of Lisztian psychological study in monomania, and, as usual, Coleman leaped over some God-given perceptual rules to land squarely on his feet. A remarkable composer played by a remarkable performer on a remarkable instrument.

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