

contact

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REVIEWS.

August 13th: Roundhouse, London.

HPSCHD: John Cage.

Take one circular building with balcony; build seven rostra and decorate each with a harpsichord, one amplified; select queues of assorted people, enough to go three times round the building and allow to stand for 2-3 hours; take 12 film projectors and 56 tape recorders, prepare coloured films of natural objects and space projects and tapes of various noises; add performers and technicians. Mix all together making sure that most of the audience are still outside the building at 9 p.m., the advertised starting time; begin before the BBC comes on the air, and stir vigorously for three hours by when all will be completed.

Just how did the ICES/Prom performance of John Cage's HPSCHD sound and look? Different for everyone there. It was what one made it. For some, an enjoyable evening in the bar, outside the sound, but still part of the occasion; for many, a chance to meet friends - very much, therefore, part of the sound; for others a scientific experiment; others an intense musical experience. Or a weird trip on the black ice-cream available throughout the performance.

The sounds, the movement, the lights, the films, the audience, the atmosphere - at any one minute of the 3½ hours the totality was not particularly different from any other minute: unless one made it so by moving around or concentrating on different things. For me, the totality was exhilarating and enjoyable. Whether it was "music" is not worth pursuing here. It certainly was for the harpsichordists playing Mozart, computerised Mozart, amplified and modulated Mozart; it was for Cage himself, ambling round the hall; it was for anyone standing by any of the speakers linked to the tape-recorded sounds; it was for anyone who allowed their ears to accept what was presented as music. I'm willing to admit that some people were probably bored and confused and sceptical; but I was glad I made the journey.

HILARY BRACEFIELD.