

ELECTRONICMUSIC

Collective creations



Members of the Eugene Electronic Music Collective have many wondrous musical "toys" with which to create strange and wonderful sounds.

It's difficult enough for commercial pop tunesmiths to break into the music business these days, but for composers of avant-garde electronic music, the odds against getting a recording deal are virtually insurmountable.

Two years ago, six local exponents of synthesizer music decided that the prospects of selling their ethereal aural sculptures could be vastly improved if they just pooled their energies, equipment and financial resources and ran the distribution business themselves. Thus, the Eugene Electronic Music Collective was born.

The six were Nathan Griffith, Phyllyp Vernacular, Peter Thomas, Derryll Parsons, former KLCC announcer Peter Nothnagle and one member who did not want to be identified. Only Griffith, Vernacular, Thomas and Parsons are currently active in the EEMC; the four are

Story by Patrick Low
Photo by Shu-shing Chen

producing, recording, promoting and distributing their music solely on their own resources.

"As individuals we couldn't get the kind of exposure that we would get if we grouped and pooled our efforts," Vernacular says. "And so the idea really was to promote ourselves as electronic composers to the, uh, world. It started out real small, but we do get mail from all over the world now."

Although the EEMC is occasionally a performance group, it is primarily a mail-order cassette dealership. The current EEMC catalogue consists of 10 tapes of solo electronic music by members past and present, including a 90-minute sampler of music by the founding members entitled "Free Fall." According to Vernacular, about 90 to 95 percent of EEMC orders are for the sampler cassette.

All the proceeds from cassette sales and local performances go back into the collective. A significant portion of its budget is allocated for purchasing ad space in alternative music magazines for listeners and composers of non-mainstream music. The magazines, such as Sound Choice, are more than just reading entertainment for the terminally hip. According to Griffith, these magazines form the communication link between musicians who market their own compositions.

"Although they aren't sold in a lot of

stores, (the magazines) are very popular among the independent music circuit," Griffith says. "Everyone who is involved with independent music knows about these magazines, gets them whenever they come out and reads them intensely. It's a network of people who trade music with each other."

The EEMC's business and music headquarters is actually Vernacular's small, cluttered campus-area apartment. The walls of the apartment are elaborately decorated with posters of Laurie Anderson, Talking Heads and other subjects too arcane to describe. Enormously long rows of phonograph records stretch across the floor beneath a long wall. When Vernacular says he listens to all kinds of music, he's not kidding.

A door on the east side of the living room leads into Vernacular's Exploding Cellos Studio. Inside, an arsenal of electronic equipment is housed along with Vernacular's eccentric collection of second-hand electronic toys, with which he can re-create just about every sound-effect you've ever heard on Warner Brothers' cartoons.

Except for the new Yamaha synthesizer, the other keyboards are all obsolete, he admits. But the rapid rate of obsolescence in the synthesizer industry is a blessing for electronic musicians like himself: most of the synthesizers in his collection cost him only a small fraction of the original price.

"I think one of the biggest assets we have is that we're limited in the machines we have," Griffith says. "Our machines are fairly primitive compared to what's being put out in electronics these days, and we have to fight to get the sounds we want. That makes it exciting because it makes us think about the sounds and how we can manipulate or combine them."

"I think when you have a limited system you know it really well," Vernacular adds. "You can get a maximum amount of expression out of that system."

Vernacular and Griffith are also involved with producing and hosting KLCC's Sunday-evening electronic-music program, "Another Green World." The show promotes the EEMC's music as well as works submitted to the collective by composers nationwide and abroad (Vernacular is especially proud that they recently received a box of tapes submitted from Yugoslavia). Their ads promise that any tapes submitted to them would be aired on the show at least once.

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