

Music



Homer Keller: Combines Teaching and Composing

Program Lists Electronic Music

An unusual concert at University of Oregon Tuesday at 8 p.m., will include student compositions in electronic music. The public is invited. The student composers are members of a new course in electronic music offered this year in the university's school of music, and taught by Homer Keller, associate professor in the music school, and

Don Hunter, director of the audio-visual department.

The works, taped for the concert, are collage (music concrete), according to Keller.

Compositions by students include works by Dennis Atkinson, Pat Chaffin, Kristine Goplen, and Barbara Possman, all graduate students from Eugene; Keith Taylor, graduate student from Ketchi-

kan, Alaska; Michael Nannice, sophomore from Grants Pass; Steven Wolfe, freshman, Donald Addison, sophomore, and Ralph Towner, senior, all of Eugene.

Concluding part of the concert will be representative tapes and recordings of electronic music by such internationally known composers as Hiller, Mel Powell, Raaijmakers and Earls.

Visiting Orchestra to Play Keller Composition

By DAN WYANT
Of the Register-Guard

When Conductor Victor Alessandri brings the San Antonio Orchestra to Eugene Thursday night for a Civic Music Assn. concert, the opening number of the program will be a work by Homer Keller, University of Oregon teacher and composer.

The performance, in a way, reinstates a relationship between composer and conductor that dates back to the late 1930s when both were students at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y.

There, the student Alessandri conducted one of student Keller's first successful compositions, "Serenade for Clarinet and Strings," a selection which subsequently was recorded by an Eastman group on the Mercury Record label.

Alessandro will conduct one of Keller's later compositions at the Thursday night concert. Entitled "Overture 1947," it was commissioned by the Nashville, Tenn., symphony orchestra when the composer taught at the University of Michigan in 1947.

Folk Dance Rhythm

It is a composition which Keller described this week as a "short overture . . . bright

and rhythmic, with sort of folk dance rhythms."

Keller, 47 and single, has been on the staff of the University of Oregon school of music since 1958. He teaches composition and music theory, and still finds time to compose.

"Frankly," he said, "you get busy teaching, though, and find you're not devoting the proper time to composition. I've been teaching the year around since I came to the University of Oregon. I want to take next summer off and devote it to composing."

With his short haircut, eyeglasses and genial air of a business executive, Keller doesn't fit the popular concept of the serious, "longhair" composer.

But music is not only his profession but his primary interest off the job as well.

"When it comes to hobbies," he said, "I guess I haven't any—except for regular workouts at the YMCA."

Besides numerous shorter works, Keller has three sym-

phonies to his credit. His first won a cash award and was given its premiere in Carnegie Hall in 1940 by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Works Performed

His Second Symphony was first performed in 1950 by the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C.

His Third Symphony received its first playing by the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra in 1956. The former University of Eugene Symphony Orchestra was the first to play the symphony in the continental United States, in 1959. The Third Symphony has since been recorded by the Japanese Philharmonic Orchestra.

In short, Keller enjoys an international reputation for his work.

Unfortunately, fame isn't necessarily accompanied by fortune if you're a serious composer. Keller's royalty checks for the Mercury records have ranged as low as three cents.

"I'm not very commercially

minded," he said. "I do something because I find it exciting."

Electronic Music

He's happy with his job and wants to continue to combine teaching and composing.

"I like teaching very much, particularly working with young composers," he said. "But I do want to take more time off to compose and to experiment with electronic music."

This latter field of music is Keller's newest interest. Together with Don Hunter, of the university's audio-visual department, Keller is teaching a course in electronic music this term for the first time.

Here, sounds are produced by a "tone generator," or electronic oscillator, then recorded on magnetic tape. Or recordings are made of noises from nature—bird calls, for example—or from the sounds of city streets or factories.

The pitch and rhythm of the sounds can then be varied by the speed of the recorder. All sorts of combinations are possible on the finished tape,

giving a composer a whole new approach to music.

Absorbing, Not Art

One of Keller's students produced a taped composition from the sounds of bottles breaking in a metal container. Another composed a tape recording from the sounds he heard in a sawmill. These both will be played as part of a student composition recital Tuesday night at the school of music.

"Electronic music is not an art yet," said Keller. "It is still experimental. But more and more serious composers are working with electronic music. I find it absorbing."

Keller said some refer to the technique as "totally organized music" since sound can be controlled to an absolute degree of volume and pitch, and the duration of tones can be controlled to the 1/1000th of a second. He added:

"In a way it's a frightening thing, because you might say it dehumanizes music. But you could say the same thing about any keyboard instrument in comparison with the human voice. I'm sure it will never replace the musician."

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