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From the Curb: Stringbuilder's Turn of the Century Conceptual Tour Yields Multi-media Poetic Icons

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I got my first information about "from the curb" as the result of accidentally running into one of the Thildebeau bros (im still not sure which one) at the Arts Council where we were both signing grant paperwork. He gave me a tiny card with their "mission" outlined in the most accursely small type, but was fortunately willing to paraphrase the content for me.

Ya see, this band of brothers had embarked on a two month bus tour of greyhound bus stations (and their environs) to present their music on a grass roots level (from the curb) TO THE RANDOM POPULACE OF THE CONTINENTAL U.S. Along the way they invited the people who gathered to listen, to record their notions as to "WHAT IS AMERICAN CULTURE in 1999?"

They documented their researches in notebooks and as photographs and also a C.D. of compiled recordings made as they played and talked to people. The inquiry, as well as the responses, are kind of on the level of an ACTION SPEAKS forum at AS220- however, in this case, the absurd vacuity of the topic is given content through the liberal application of poetic license.

The result is a very intriguing set of genuine/ faux-artifacts, which has been very cleverly edited and composed by this pair of enormously gifted young men. The array of documents on display at AS220 includes a series of screenprinted photos heightened by bold captions selected from remarks written by their various audiences. The combination of image and copy is arrived at by some kind of random, intuitive sensibility that has a fabulously beatnik solemnity . Taking the random bits of sight, sound, and thought that they had collected, they proceeded to re-arranging them, as if composing a song, into enigmatic, poetic and mysterious icons which are more evocative of a cultural presence, than any simple snapshot, sound bite, or scribbled blurb could ever approximate as a bland factual document.

What struck me first about the exhibition was the level of craft employed in creating this series of documentary icons. Like the quality of playing in Stringbuilders music, these objects are wonderfully crafted and clearly the work of some very discriminating fingers. The choices of paper, text and print medium are as precise and lovingly finessed as any of their songs, which is I think saying quite a lot about them, particularly in the context of the AS220 venue which now boasts its openness to art "of every caliber". The experience of looking at the images and reading the selected texts creates a very satisfying and seamless recording of their wandering minstrel eyes. Primarily the inquiries which Stringbuilder presents in their music, in this tour, and in the culminating documents- is a very provocative mixture of callow, introspective wondering with a bold spirit of invention, fueled by a rather precocious view of the machinations of society. The mixture presented at AS220 provokes more than anything, a question about the trajectory of these two very talented artists...

...where to next?
I received a couple of homebaked CDs from the old plerets somewhat permanently installed in one of my cd players as music to make me more comfortable in my studio. The tracks contained here-in range from the O'Keeffe "free" field recordings with the ethereal, "time-free" works, to those purdy bassy, deliciously polyphythmical dance tracks. These recordings are, on one hand a compendium of the artists work while in residence at As220, and on the other, the impetus for me to briefly recount a history of electronics, over the seventy some odd years that such sound has qualified as music. For several reasons which will hopefully become clear in the course of this essay.

Now that synthesizers, scoring, d.j.'s, and beat boxes, and sampling devices have reduced virtually every recording artist to electronic sound source, there is a massive cross breeding in effect. Well actually its been in effect for more than twenty years. Although this "scene" is still creating names or virtuous composers like Mr. O'Keeffe, its seem that the proliferation of this activity, is, more than anything, making electronics anonymous.

Which is good, I think.

Before synthesizers got funky, they were used primarily to evoke strange, ineffable transcendental feelings by composing out of what you might call the SERIOUS MODERN CLASSICAL MUSIC TRADITION. The first work of this type of composition which came to my mind was the Morton Suberley's "POEM ELECTRONIZM" which was played originally in a 1967 "musical" specifically designed for it with sounds emanating from constantly changing speaker locations creating a "spatial" effect that is a whole lot closer to the concept of ambient, than a lot of brand new work.

Before Robert Moog hooked a keyboard to a set of oscillators around 1970 it was primarily such spacyo random sounds which was most prevalent at modern dance concerts.

Walter/Monkey Carlos and Kraftwerk took the new instrument and made new music with the ultimate economy of parts yielding the deepest suggestive impact of the whole, and yet it spoke softly to every quarter of the mind. To heighten the malicious irony of the experience, I kept hearing my third wife saying, "the greatest thing about underwear is that you can enjoy it alone".

I would very much enjoy seeing this work installed in the upstairs gallery and given the kind of setting appropriate for a composition so piquant and provocative, but maybe it is due to its almost accidental presentation, no kind of alternative party decoration. I don't even know if it was intended to be art. I only knew I was overloaded and caused by the repetition and prefer not to mention that stupid incident that merely a happy accident.

ASSORTED RECORDINGS BY
TIM O'KEEFE
AND A BRIEF HISTORY OF ELECTRONICA

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EXPOSED!

Ethan Vlah: The State of his Unit

A new show has opened at the gallery. An exhibition of the ELECTRONICA of As220 which permits me to experience art and the intentions of an artist without the global machinations of the culture war.