



Unlike in the 1960s, when every major recording label had its contemporary or new music series, we now find that the majority of the most adventurous recordings are being produced privately. Typical of this trend is the emergence of Lovely Music, Ltd., something of a microcosm of contemporary music recording.

The number of independent releases grows daily, with progressive composers and musicians producing their own recordings and distributing them as best they can (see Magic Moe's "Survival Notes" from Vol. 2 No. 5). Of all these independent projects, Lovely Music seems to be the year's most ambitious. Their first series consists of six releases: Robert Ashley, David Behrman, Peter Gordon, Jon Hassell, Meredith Monk, and "Blue" Gene Tyranny. Six more are planned for the fall (Jacques Bequart, Rhys Chatham, Gordon Mumma, Tom Johnson, Alvin Lucier and Phil Niblock) with a Jill Krosen release coming before next spring.

The origins of the label are closely tied up with Performing Artservices in New York. This is a non-profit corporation which acts as agent/manager for many new music, dance and theatre artists, including arranging tours and handling the administrative side of other non-profit corporations formed by the artists. These include The Sonic Arts Union, The Philip Glass Ensemble, and Lovely Music, a project of Artservices' director, Mimi Johnson. Her aim was to aid her friends by managing the distribution and other merchandising problems of independently produced recordings. It was thought advisable to have a professional service to relieve the artist of the tiresome work of distribution, advertising and mailings.

Lovely Music and the composers have an arrangement whereby production and marketing are separated. Recording and first pressing costs are paid by each composer, whereas distribution and the cost of successive pressings are the responsibility of the record company. Mimi says that the demand for the records has been steady, and she expects an initial yearly sale of at least 1000 copies of each record. She claims that a large recording company will ultimately sell no more records than Lovely Music, the difference being that a major firm would expect to turn over this many discs in just a few months.

## THE LOVELY MUSIC SERIES

# New Music, New Label

The current series of six releases reflects a wide spectrum of today's music. While the music of Peter Gordon and "Blue" Gene Tyranny has strong rock elements, David Behrman's rich work using a Kim-1 mini-computer and improvising musicians represents a more technocratic approach. Trumpeter Jon Hassell brings African-flavored percussion to music already influenced by jazz and electronics, and Meredith Monk and Robert Ashley both blend theatrical and literary arts with their music to create new unities.

The most obviously funk-influenced of the six is Peter Gordon's **Star Jaws**, which manages to parade the influences of Chicago Blues and heavy rock 'n' roll, while at the same time including traces of Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Phil Glass. The common essence of all these influences is that the music is minimal in several parameters, and Gordon uses this to create rich instrumental textures of compelling rhythm. He also keeps his voice minimal, especially on "Life is Boring," where it is relentlessly dry, almost strained. The instrumentals have a very loose "feel," especially "Machomusic," the best cut, which drives along like an unstoppable solid chrome semi-, careening through the Utah flats at 4 a.m.: four percussive tenor saxes in a constant lung-pounding dance 'til dawn.

"Blue" Gene Tyranny's **Out of the Blue** draws on more fluid jazz and "San Francisco" rock influences. The vocals often express gentle, tender sentiments, and a concern with planetary awareness. Such thoughts are often awkward, and this feeling is heightened musically by lines that tend to run on too long, or by suspended rhythms. The title track, "Out of the Blue/A Letter From Home About Sound and Consciousness," (similar of course to ELO's last album title, but "Blue" Gene claims that both were named at the same time), along with "Leading a Double Life," are the most lyrical cuts on the recording. Both feature delicate harmonic material drawing on

French, German, Rag and "Blue" keyboard traditions. "Next Time Might be Your Time" is a catchy "new age" love song. Throughout the album "Blue"'s Polymoog work is masterfully luxurious and fluent.

Jon Hassell's **Vernal Equinox** is much more African in orientation, but like "Blue" and Peter Gordon he is largely interested in more immediately accessible music than that usually termed "new music." He features imaginative trumpet lines, perhaps improvised, over various percussive, electronic or environmental drones. The trumpet's clicks and curls are filled with novel and engaging turns. On two cuts, for example, David Rosenboom alters the trumpet with a Buchla synthesizer system, while on "Viva Shona" he is joined by Hassell on Fender Rhodes, with Arp synthesizer alterations by Andy Jerison. Serge synthesizer and Motorola Scalatron provide drones for the other cuts. The opening track, "Toucan Ocean," has a drone of shakers (possibly pods of dried beans) mixed with constant, though sensitive and gentle, congas. The Buchla processing lightly alters the trumpet's timbre, giving a rounded bubble to the sound. In all, this is an eminently likeable recording.

State-of-the-art mini-computer electronics is represented by composer/designer David Behrman. He maintains an active performing career, often performing with the Merce Cunningham Company, and has been a visiting professor at the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, where Robert Ashley is director. At least part of four of the recordings was done there. The two pieces here are both intended for live performance with electronics. In "Figure in a Clearing," the title track, the computer is programmed to control the harmonic and rhythmic settings of 16 triangle wave generators provided for the soloist. Mixed with these are 16 additional triangle wave generators and one sine wave drone. The program for the rhythm is modelled on the continuously fluctuating velocity of "A

satellite in falling elliptical orbit about a planet." The soloist is cellist David Gibson, who improvises delicately with this subtle texture.

"On the Other Ocean" is David Behrman's most recent solution to the problem of building electronics which are sensitive to the sounds of live performers. This is a live recording of an improvisation by Maggi Payne, flute; Arthur Stidole, bassoon; and Kim-1, harmonic responses. Pitch sensing circuits activate the "interrupt" line and input ports of the Kim-1, and determine harmonic changes in the two homemade music synthesizers. In this case the electronic sounds take wide gaping leaps and bounds, whereas before the motion was step-like and abrupt. Although each piece exceeds 20 minutes and the timbral changes are few, the effect could easily sustain interest for an hour in live performance.

The two remaining records synthesize various art disciplines in a way that could be called "multi-media," although not in a completely pure form. Meredith Monk's **Key** is called "invisible theatre," music in a stark, minimal presentation. There are elements, like footfalls and other stage sounds, that add an almost naturalistic element, but much of the piece is built on Meredith's astounding voice. It includes elements of Japanese, American Indian, Semitic and extended vocal practices. The blend is so unique and refined that people unfamiliar with vocal work of this nature have an exciting work to explore.

**Private Parts**, Robert Ashley's cinematographic recording, contains two songs or poems with music: "The Park" and "The Backyard." Ashley narrates his own visually evocative text, and in all, the work is the most developed, experimental, and yet warmly familiar work of the series. Somehow, without direct reference to any popular music forms such as rock or jazz, without any overt nod to contemporary folk music, Ashley has pointed the way to a music of great beauty and potentially wide appeal.

These two pieces were recently performed, with another song, by Ashley and "Blue" Gene Tyranny at the Kitchen Center for Video and Music (59 Wooster St, NYC 10012). These are the first three pieces in a seven song cycle and it will be interesting to observe the developing progress of this major opus.

—Bob Davis