

What Does A Tricycle



Eduardo Kusnir photographed by Eddie Crespo.

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The little girl pedaled her tricycle as the public looked on with disbelief. Eduardo Kusnir, Argentinian composer, ran his fingers over the keyboard, occasionally glancing at his partner performing at the other piano and the little girl cycling around them. This world premiere of Kusnir's "Brindis (Toast) No. 3" jolted many people who attended the San Juan Casa Blanca concert last Sunday. "What," asked one puzzled music teacher, "has a tricycle to do with the composition? Is this a joke?"

Kusnir in no way considers this unusual approach a joke. The use of a tricycle, or any other material, belongs to his musical philosophy. "Perturbations" or "interferences" are

important elements in the construction of a Kusnir work. The composer intentionally uses interferences to provoke new situations, to create different ways of looking at objects. Within his "Brindis No. 3," there are certain key fragments by Beethoven which serve as a signal for the pianists to change from one musical pattern to another. When one pianist plays the Beethoven fragment, the other must necessarily stop, move on to another part of the composition, and eventually play the Beethoven signal which will interfere with the musical trajectory of the first pianist. A state of provocation, of tension exists as if two steel marbles were released simultaneously in a pinball machine, bouncing against each other, constantly creating new situations.

The tricycle interferes with the

public. As the child pedals throughout the composition, the listener-watcher reacts differently than he would if the tricycle did not exist. "Suppose we heard a pianist perform an all-Bach concert," says Kusnir, "but instead of the traditional presentation we tie a rooster to the piano leg. Certainly the audience would not appreciate the music in the same way. The rooster is the "perturbation."

The Kusnir musical structure is bombarded by contradictions, by interferences, in order to avoid a strict linear development of the music. Kusnir does not want the public to recognize a carefully balanced architecture in which at the end of the piece a melody reappears so that the listener is satisfied by this identification. He plays with the use of "chance" and allows his music to develop according to the same principles that rule daily life. The unexpected often impinges upon one's daily program. It is this way in the music of Kusnir.

The idea of play permeates Kusnir's music. He has a fascination for circuses and carnivals that stems from childhood when he spent vacations travelling with his uncle's road show amusement park. Kusnir possesses a solid preparation in traditional music having studied piano, conducting, and composition before entering the vanguard world of music at the DiTella Institute in Buenos Aires, an internationally-known center for new music activities. After two years of work at DiTella, the composer travelled to Europe working in electronic music laboratories in Paris, Holland, and Belgium.

Kusnir, who refuses to say how old he is (he is 34), currently lives in Paris, but expresses disdain for European musical movements. He believes that the real creative activities are being done by composers of the Americas. Yet he feels that his presence in Paris is not a contradiction. "I live in a foreign environment even though the musical



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activity is not terribly inspiring, because as a foreigner I must define my art as clearly as possible. I must make my art as strong as possible, clarify my identity, so that I may fend off attacks. The foreigner is always vulnerable and must protect himself."

Many voices stridently objected to Kusnir's second premiere in Puerto Rico, "Brindis No. 4," also on Sunday's program, which finds two pianists seated at two pianos with their heads and arms protruding from huge white cubes which they wear as vests. This Beckett-like atmosphere lasted 15 minutes during which the pianists played no music. The composition is based on 12 typical gestures of pianists such as moving the head while playing or raising the eyebrows during the execution of a musical passage. Kusnir insists that it is as important to see a work as to hear it and developed this game of gestures between the two encubed pianists. When asked about the public's reaction he said "The public doesn't have to look for any special symbolism, or seek out the 'true' meaning. That's a lot of foolishness. I'm interested in the game, let the public react as they want. You know, the public has a terrible fear of anything that they cannot catalogue or classify. They feel threatened and consequently tend to denigrate that to which they cannot relate easily."

The Argentinian composer will not defend his works. He feels the presence of an umbilical cord between him and his composition during the act of creation but once the work is completed it must stand by itself. "My compositions, once finished, are objects. Let people do what they want with them. They can use them as toothpaste or soap. It's up to them. I will not waste time protecting my music."

One of Kusnir's greatest dislikes is "The Intellectual." His contact with the musical elite in Paris proved dissatisfying. He felt that they dwelled to such an extent on the beauty of constructing a sound, either electronic or from natural noises, that they all ended up with a meaningless, bloodless preciosity. Kusnir hates to be bored. It grates upon his nerves. Unfortunately he often feels suffocated by the monotony of daily life.

As for the future, Kusnir sees life ahead as a great "incertitude full of colors." He relishes his situation, which is also an intimate part of his musical philosophy. "I do not feel sufficiently provoked by this incertitude to find a definite planned solution to the future. I accept these perturbations and I accept the incertitude."

Whether Kusnir desires it or not, his life and his way of being are like his "Brindis," fascinating mixtures of seriousness and refreshing playfulness.

IS THIS A JOKE?

