

AFTERWORD

Kyle Gann's obituary of Jerry appeared in *The Village Voice*, December 21, 1993:

When John Cage performed in Dallas in 1975, the private reception afterward was dominated by a thin, intense-looking guy whose spindly limbs swept the air as he spoke. He was comparing episodes of 'I Love Lucy' to the Beethoven sonatas as varied manifestations of a recurring structural formula. I thought he was brilliant and nuts at the same time, and those two words have come back to me every time I've seen Jerry Hunt perform. I had no idea he was anybody significant, but five years later I saw him again at New Music America, making high-tech electronic music by hitting a suitcase with a stick.

Hunt was a bundle of nervous energy, never boiling over, but eternally simmering. His doctor made him cut down on his 40 cups of coffee a day, and after he gave up chain-smoking—not early enough, tragically, to prevent him from dying of lung cancer three days before his 50th birthday—he chewed nicotine gum vigorously, even onstage.

He was the fastest talker I've ever interviewed.

*His music was a personal, hermetic religion. His works, with titles like **Chimanzzi (olun): core** and **Bitom (stream): link**, were based on a private geography of Texas towns meshed with the angelic tables of the 16th-century magus John Dee. Bells on his wrists jingled as he banged endless tremolos on the piano. Electronic sounds would burble, video images would flip, as he whipped fishing poles toward the audience. Every gesture in his repertoire seethed with inscrutable meaning. When I told a friend Hunt had died, and that I wished I understood his music enough to describe how it worked, she said, "No one knew what Jerry was doing. Make up something."*

Hunt lived in a barn on his mother's property, somewhere northeast of Dallas. When you called up, his mother would

*answer and switch the call to the barn. He's survived by his lover, Stephen Housewright. Unfortunately, his primary exposure outside new-music circles came from a pointless controversy. He had collaborated with Karen Finley (even **she** couldn't upstage him), and when he was later on a panel that gave her a grant, right-wingers trying to discredit the NEA trumped up a conflict-of-interest complaint. Even had they investigated Hunt personally, they wouldn't have comprehended his level of artistic purity. Luckily, before he died, he got one fantastically characteristic audio document of his work onto disc: **Ground:Five Mechanic Convention Streams** on the 0.0. label.*

His death November 27 makes no more sense than his music did, but the latter was an astonishing feat of manic intensity.

Jerry's works and pieces composed in tribute to him were performed in several concerts given during the first six months of 1994. This is my description of the first:

*The memorial concert for Jerry in Houston was given in the Rothko Chapel on January 29th by **DiverseWorks**, the contemporary arts organization for which Jerry had performed several times over the years and that had invited him to give a concert on the 29th in connection with the John Cage exhibition at the Menil Collection. The octagonal Rothko Chapel is located on the grounds of the Menil, a park-like area near the University of St. Thomas. The Chapel contains the huge, almost solidly black paintings of Mark Rothko; as one walks about the space, or sits on the benches, each of these somber works becomes a window opening inward to the darkness that we usually decline to see—a darkness both of a personal dimension and of the world. The tiny square of light at the very top of the ceiling invites the gaze upward and beyond, but it is hard to keep the head back for very long.*

On the 29th that gaze was, instead, led forward to the stage and its video monitor, microphones, and various nondescript objects cluttering the performance space.

There was little sound as the 150 or so people assembled on the benches. Michael Parenteau began by reading a tribute to Jerry that described his career and his art and the influence Cage had on him and that he himself has on artists and audiences. For a minute nothing happened. Then Michael Galbreth started a videotape of Jerry performing on a stool, gesturing and waving some of the objects he made, to a background of his music.

No one would have been less likely than Jerry to invite people anywhere for 'canned' entertainment, and the Art Guys, Ellen Fullman, and Pauline Oliveros tacitly acknowledged that fact as they very slowly and deliberately opened the live portion of the concert by making sounds and gestures that had come to be associated with Jerry's own work. Michael began reading quotes from Jerry's letters and interviews by taking cards at random from a paper sack on the floor. The quotes pertained to music and religion, primarily, but several were anecdotal and of a personal nature. Many were funny. Sometimes Michael lay down to read them, like a little boy doing his homework. And sometimes he drew a card only to read it to himself; Jerry would have liked that touch.

Meanwhile, Ellen began assembling several objects on the other side of the performance space. She dragged a metal folding chair across the stone floor; then brought in a man's sportscoat and a pair of shoes. She carried a picture of Jerry, one that had been taken in performance, through the audience, illuminating it with the flashlight that Jerry himself so often used.

Jack Massing accompanied the words and movement by making a variety of sounds. He held a yards-long glass tube filled with BB pellets, allowing them to roll first one way and then the other, producing a rushing, oscillating sound like ocean waves, or heavy eerie breathing. Then he put on plastic gloves (another of Jerry's trademarks) and shook tiny bells and other metallic objects—often quite close to Michael's face and body as he read. Most of

these small instruments were taken from a suitcase sitting in full view of the audience, yet another of Jerry's practices.

And through it all, from the sides and back of the Chapel, and sometimes from places on the benches themselves, came the notes from Pauline's accordion—plaintive, distant, occasionally angry-sounding, moving here and there. At one dramatic moment, she appeared in a side doorway holding a black umbrella over herself as she played.

Within a few minutes, Ellen had completed her tableau: the chair now with the coat on the back, the shoes placed together in front of it, Jerry's picture in the seat lit by the flashlight lying in front of it, and the tilde (~) that Jerry always signed his letters with reproduced on a card and positioned just above the photograph. Then Ellen walked to her mike and read Jerry's words in a loud, strong voice: 'If I don't get there, just put my picture in a chair.'

The final minutes of the concert were devoted to a portion of another videotape Jerry made. We see only his head, above a broad, white Elizabethan collar. He whistles, blows, and breathes, all the while making a series of facial expressions that suggest, alternately, a magus and a clown; sometimes it appears that he has in fact been possessed. The lamps used to light the video recording are bright in Jerry's eyes as he looks directly out at us. The white brightness that had emanated from the center of the Chapel ceiling seemed to have moved to those eyes.

One by one the performers left the stage.

Pauline's accordion grew silent. Then there was a loud noise offstage, like a paper sack being burst. And Michael Galbreth walked out, looked at the audience, and said (as had Jerry so many times at the ends of concerts), 'Well, I guess that's it.'

The Dallas performance group Voices of Change dedicated their February 7th concert at SMU to Jerry's memory. Pianist Jo Boatright played "Melody", Jerry's last composition. Laurie Shulman described the work in the concert program:

'Melody' is not nearly so simple as its title. Hunt builds the piece above a static open fourth in the left hand that functions as an ostinato.

The right hand has all the activity, alternating shorter notes with long, wide intervals with an occasional melisma. The effect is an appealing mix, rather like chant crossed with new age jazz.... 'Piano was always Jerry's first love,' says Housewright. 'It's appropriate that his last piece should be for piano.'

On March 12th Voices of Change presented a memorial concert at the Contemporary Culture Gallery. In addition to the video works ***Birome [zone]: plane (fixture)*** and ***Transform (stream): core***, some footage from an interview with Jerry filmed by Paul Bosner was shown. Jo Boatright again performed "Melody," and the chamber ensemble assisted by Ron and Joan Snider offered an interpretation of ***Chimanzzi (olun): double***. Various audience members were asked to read some of Jerry's quotes.

There were three events in New York City in March remembering Jerry. Petr Kotik's S.E.M. Ensemble performed 'Melody' in two instrumental versions and showed three video works (including ***Bitom (fixture): topogram***) on March 15th at the Paula Cooper Gallery. On the 16th, Roulette hosted an informal "video shivoo," showing interview footage, a videotape of a 1977 recital given at Paul and Oz Sreses', and title music sequences from programs Jerry worked on for the Dallas County Community College District (with Paul Bosner).

A memorial concert was held at Phill Niblock's Experimental Intermedia Foundation on March 19th. Jane Henry performed a version of ***Chimanzzi*** on violin, and Laetitia Sonami presented a piece employing an electronic glove; both artists used some of Jerry's music. Joseph Celli offered ***Phalba (Revisited)***, a piece "loosely based on materials, mimetic gestures, sounds and notations from the original ***PHALBA (stream): extractive*** that Jerry composed for me in 1983." The electronic arts ensemble 77Hz/REV 2 created a multimedia work, ***Telephone Calls to the Dead***, based in part on an unfinished collaboration between Jerry and Michael Schell. And Karen Finley sent a videotape in which she read excerpts from letters Jerry had sent her through the years.

Two memorial concerts took place in the summer. One

was coordinated by Steve Key and was held in San Diego. Some of Jerry's as yet unrecorded songs were played, accompanied by slides, and a couple of his video works were shown.

The last concert was given at the Outpost Performance Space in Albuquerque on June 18th. Pauline Oliveros performed, using several of Jerry's video works; she was assisted by lone, Margrit Schenker, and Joanna Whitney. The evening was sponsored by the Nonsequitur Foundation, whose music gallery on Fifth Street concurrently displayed several hundred of the artifacts Jerry used in his video work and in performance. (Steve Peters had come to Canton the previous weekend to select these objects and take them back to Albuquerque for the exhibition.)

I described that last concert as follows:

Steve Peters welcomed the audience and talked a little about Jerry's work, pointing out that Jerry's interest in the occult had a playful dimension that adds a special element of pleasure to the usual bafflement audiences feel when exposed to the pieces. He then introduced Pauline Oliveros, whose remarks emphasized Jerry's originality; she made the comment that although Jerry might have been considered a 'marginal' composer by the music establishment, 'margins always surround the text.'

*Jerry's video work ***Birome [zone]: plane (fixture)*** was shown. Then Pauline led a meditation, while playing the accordion in accompaniment to a videotape Jerry had made of his performance artifacts moving through space (he used this tape as an adjunct in performance). Margrit, lone, and Joanna meditated alongside Pauline, whose accordion sounds were sparse—tones played from the keyboard, sometimes short, sometimes sustained, low notes from the bass buttons, some 'scratching' of the bellows themselves.*

After an intermission, the final piece, a quintet, was performed. Margrit appeared in black with her face swathed in gauze. She remained a ghostly presence at the grand piano, plucking the strings, striking the wood of the instrument, from time to time playing a few notes on the keyboard, and groaning, sighing, and even screaming intermittently. lone, dressed in a gold and

black sari, wandered around the performance space carrying a candle on a dish; her face, like Margrit's, was concealed.

Joanna approached the microphone dressed in a tight gold lame gown, sleeveless to reveal the extensive tattoos on her arms. As she gently gyrated her hips and undulated her right arm and hand, she read excerpts from quotations taken from published interviews with Jerry in an exaggerated declamatory style, widely varying pitch and volume levels, sustaining and clipping phrases, and yet maintaining an expression on her face that suggested a vast distance from the content of the texts. She never stopped the regular motions of her body throughout the reading.

*Pauline stood at one side of the space and blew on a conch, producing both staccato sounds and sustained, sometimes tremulous sequences. The video monitors showed Jerry's **Transform (stream): core**, the piece he made wearing an Elizabethan collar;*

tonelessly whistling and blowing, making a variety of facial expressions, and accompanied by a percussive soundtrack using rattles, bells, and drums.

*What was especially moving about the quintet was this inclusion of Jerry as a participant throughout the piece. The sounds on the videotape, but mostly his facial expressions (ranging from delight to incredulity to shock), made a kind of commentary on everything else that was happening, and there were some remarkable **frissons** when coincidences involving the quotes occurred.*

Everything melded together, through a climactic moment and to the final words about the experience of being 'reborn to sound' that Joanna read after the videotape had concluded. Pauline had directed the entire piece, it seemed, blowing into the shell; her last, breath-like sound lingered in the quiet room a while after the tribute was done.