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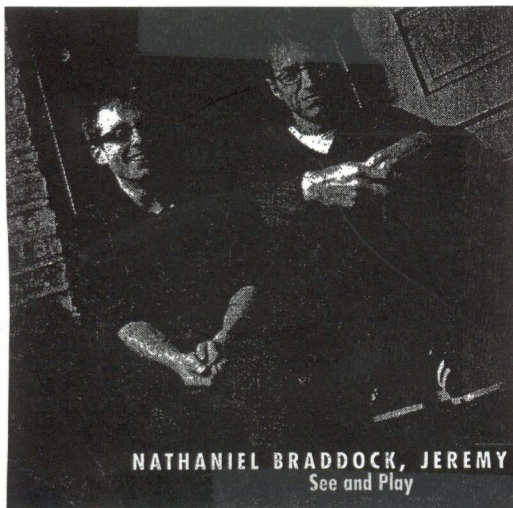
Gallery 400 (MC 033)
College of Architecture and the Arts
400 South Peoria Street
Chicago, Illinois 60607-7034

Between Sound and Vision
"Post No Bills: Off the Charts"
by Peter Margasak
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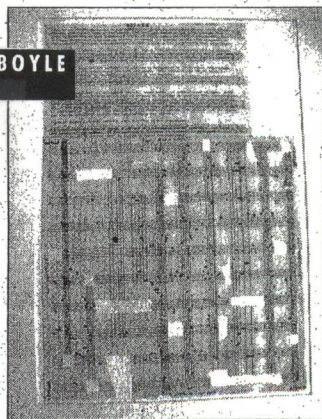
Off the Charts

When composers like John Cage and Morton Feldman began experimenting with graphic notation more than half a century ago, they were trying to make music more interesting by cultivating unpredictability. Though they didn't always dispense entirely with the conventional means of translating music to paper—staff lines, note shapes, and so forth—their use of varied line sizes, abstract shapes, colors, and written directions granted the performers a newfound freedom in interpreting the work. In subsequent decades, the practice has produced diverse and sometimes superconceptual work, from Philip Corner's "Mississippi River South of Memphis," which blurs the line between cartography and composition, to Dick Higgins's "1000 Symphonies," in which the composer riddled standard staff lines with bullet holes.

But while it's fascinating to see the scores, which sometimes constitute artwork in their own right, and to delve into the theory behind them, the music itself often completely abandons traditional harmony and rhythm—the elements that allow most people to understand and enjoy a piece of music. "When you listen to a lot of 20th-century music it's not always that interesting," says guitarist and trumpeter Nathaniel Braddock. In fact, if you don't understand the relationship of the sounds to a graphic score, they can sound downright random. So when Braddock agreed last spring to assemble music for "Between Sound and Vision"—a new exhibit at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Gallery 400 that explores the concept of graphic notation—he wanted to guarantee that those relationships would be crystal clear. "I think it's great to present an understanding of how this music is written with how it's realized," he says.



NATHANIEL BRADDOCK, JEREMY BOYLE
See and Play



LARRY AUSTIN'S SQUARE

Post No Bills

BY PETER MARGASAK

The core of the show is a collection of graphic scores that were excerpted by Cage and Fluxus composer Alison Knowles for a book called *Notations*, published in 1969 by Higgins's Something Else Press. The book has long been out of print, and many of the original scores have been archived since 1976 at Northwestern University, where Cage bequeathed his papers. The 30 selections presented in "Between Sound and Vision" come from a range of sources, from more conventional composers like Charles Ives, György Ligeti, and Iannis Xenakis to visually oriented artists like Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, and Al Hansen, grandfather of pop star Beck. The show will also feature "sculptural instruments" by Paul Panhuysen and Achim Wollscheid, among others, and contemporary works dealing with the visual conception of sound by the likes of Phill Niblock and Joan LaBarbara.

The show began as a class project under UIC art history professor Hannah Higgins, the daughter of Higgins and Knowles, in late 1999. Among her students was Jeremy Boyle, who contributes electronics to the experimental rock band Joan of Arc. Boyle recruited Braddock, an improviser and a member of another experimental rock band, the Ancient Greeks, knowing that he had a keen interest in graphic notation, and together they produced a CD for inclusion in the catalog. Most of the tracks are new works by artists featured in the show, but the pair also sought out six local groups and artists to record some of the old scores from Cage's collection. Those new recordings will also be loaded into CD players installed near the corresponding scores in the exhibit.

"We wanted to get players that could play traditionally and read music as well as some whose background was not in conventional notation and whose instrumentation wouldn't be traditional," says Boyle. "We were trying to cover as much ground as possible." They included ensembles led by Gene Coleman, Guillermo Gregorio, Fred Lonberg-Holm, and Braddock; the

experimental electronic music group TV Pow; and sound artist Brennan McGaffey. The interpretations vary pretty dramatically. The score for *Square*, a Larry Austin piece per-

formed by Braddock's quartet, comprises ten horizontal and ten vertical staves intersecting different-size dots; the page is positioned differently for each of the four musicians, who interpret it using the instruments of their choice, following a few open-ended guidelines. But McGaffey used the score for Tomas Marco's *Sü*—a series of horizontal lines—as a blueprint to build a neon sculpture, then set up eight microphones to record the irregular hum each line emitted.

Boyle and Braddock have organized several concerts in conjunction with the exhibit over the next few weeks. On Sunday afternoon at HotHouse, several solo performers, including Boyle and McGaffey, will perform works from the Cage archive. Local composer and pianist George Flynn, whose Duo for Violin and Piano was excerpted in *Notations*, will discuss that work in particular and Fluxus activity in New York during the 60s in general, then perform a few of his compositions. The official opening reception, at Gallery 400 on Thursday, February 15, will feature performances by Knowles and Panhuysen, works from the Cage collection interpreted by the prominent new-music ensemble Cube, and improvisation by the musicians on the CD. And on Sunday, February 25, at the Empty Bottle, TV Pow, Fred Lonberg-Holm, and the ensembles led by Gregorio and Braddock will give performances of the works they recorded for the CD.

"One of the intentions was to use *Notations* as a starting point," says Boyle. "It's a very specific thing, but it covers so many different places. There are a lot of people involved in this from different communities, but hopefully it will seem cohesive."

"Between Sound and Vision" will be at Gallery 400, 400 S. Peoria, through March 10. Hours are 9 AM to 5 PM Monday through Friday and noon to 4 PM on Saturday; the February 15 reception starts at 6 PM. Call 312-996-6114 for more information.

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