

Max Neuhaus and Como Park Conservatory." Minneapolis: Minneapolis Public Radio. June 2, 1980.

<https://www.max-neuhaus.estate/en/copyright>



New Music America, 1980. Archive Estate

PERFORMING ARTS: NEW MUSIC AMERICA MAX NEUHAUS: INTERVIEW , SOUND INSTALLATION, 06/80, TAPE #1 1980

Location: Como Park Conservatory, St.Paul. Date: opens June 5, 1980.

Organized by WAC and commissioned by the city of St. Paul, a permanent sound installation will be opened prior to New Music America in the Como Park Conservatory.

Designed for the space by artist Max Neuhaus, the installation will be located in the central rotunda of the Conservatory. The piece, involving an elaborate electronic music system, will virtually fill the space with gradually modulating 'sound shapes' - tactile music that surrounds a listener with subtle tones.

The installation marks Neuhaus' first exploration of a greenhouse space. The piece will be a permanent addition to the Conservatory. Since 1965, Neuhaus, a leading sound environment artist, has worked outside the realm of conventional concert hall situations, focusing his attention on new situations and sound sources. In the process of largely creating and developing the concept of 'the sound installation,' Neuhaus has changed many preconceived notions of when and where music can occur.

Accession Number: 94.V0081

Director: Charles Helm

Executive producer: Walker Art Center

Production company: Walker Art Center

Type: Video

Classification: Music

Copyright: 1980

Credit Line: Walker Art Center Archives: Sound and Moving Image Collections

DOWNTOWNER

Sound Shapes

Artist's Sound Installation Becomes Permanent Feature at Como Conservatory



Gathered for the opening of Neuhaus's sound installation at Como are, left to right, Allie Wittensberg, president of Walker Art Center's Board of Directors, Martin Friedman, director of Walker, artist Max Neuhaus, Mayor George Latimer and Frank Marzittelli, President of St. Paul Arts and Science Council.

On Thursday, June 5, a permanent sound installation by New York artist Max Neuhaus opened in the Como Conservatory in St. Paul, Minnesota's largest greenhouse. Commissioned by the city of St. Paul and organized by Walker Art Center and the Schubert Club, the work will become a major feature of New Music America, a nine-day festival of diversified contemporary music events to take place in the Twin Cities June 7 through 15.

Neuhaus designed the installation for the Conservatory's central rotunda. The piece involves an elaborate electronic music system that will virtually fill the space with gradually modulating "sound shapes" — tactile music that surrounds a listener with subtle tones. The installation marks Neuhaus's first exploration of a greenhouse space. "The glass walls and plants form a



Sound shape creator Max Neuhaus.

unique environment with many acoustical possibilities. It is a beautiful space and one that I am enjoying working with," Neuhaus

realm of conventional concert hall situations, focusing his attention on new situations and sound sources. In the process of largely creating and developing the concept of "the sound installation," he has changed many preconceived notions of when and where music can occur. According to Neuhaus: "A lot of people still seem locked into the idea that whatever happens in a concert hall is music, and whatever happens outside the concert hall is not. I'm trying to change that."

Prior to his career as a sound specialist/conceptual artist, Neuhaus received his B.A. and M.M. degrees from Manhattan School of Music. He then toured North America and Europe, first with the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble conducted by Pierre Boulez, then as percussion soloist with Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Walker Art Center

Synthesizers sculpt conservatory space

(Neuhaus, from Page 1B)

trical engineering because technology, he says, creates a great distance between the artist and his material.

"What's wrong with electronic music is that it's usually built with engineering values, not musical values," he says.

That's why Neuhaus had to work 12 hours a day for the past three weeks at Como with an engineer and two assistants. He spent six months working on the \$63,000 project. He and his staff had to build the synthesizers and a computer (with pinball machine parts) to operate them. Then he had to work out technical problems and compose and program his pieces.

"I'm midway between a composer and a sculptor," Neuhaus says. "I try to transform space with sound."

Neuhaus's sound installations are but one example of the experimental music that will be performed as part of the New Music America. About 100 composers, musicians and performers from all over the world will take part in the festival, the largest gathering of its kind, presenting works that range from avant-garde jazz and new-wave rock to ambient and minimalist music.

To some people, New Music America may sound like a lot of noise created by a bunch of eccentrics. Many will dismiss the music and experiments as too esoteric or cerebral. Yet, to others, it may be the most fascinating musical happening since the Beatles, or, perhaps more appropriately, John Cage.

After all it was Cage, the grandfather of this weird new music, who observed back in the 1930s: "Whereas in the past, the point of disagreement has been between dissonance and consonance, it will be, in the immediate future, between noise and so-called musical sounds."

Free concerts

In the next week, Twin Cities audiences will have the opportunity to debate those kinds of questions.

The Walker Art Center auditorium will have concerts nightly starting Saturday and continuing through June 15. These programs will culminate with a performance June 16 at the Guthrie Theater featuring the minimalist Philip

Glass Ensemble; the David Byrne Ensemble, led by the leader of the new-wave rock band Talking Heads; and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, an avant-garde jazz group.

In addition, lunch-time concerts will be Monday through Friday in downtown Minneapolis. Those performances and most of the other New Music America events will be free.

Several sound installations, including Neuhaus' permanent piece at Como commissioned by the city of St. Paul, will be set up in Butler Square in Minneapolis, Landmark Center in St. Paul and in the former home of Dennis Russell Davies, the former music director of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (the group that will play at the festival's first concert).

New Music America also will feature several demonstrations of ambient music, an extension of Muzak, or canned background music. British art-rock guru Brian Eno's "Music for Airports" will be piped in at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. His ambient music and that of four other composers will be played daily at Nicollet Mall's bus stops. And a booth on the mall will offer on-the-spot, original compositions for sale.

A series of environmental performances include the writing of two to three dozen bicycles for sound and a carillon concert using bells in local churches and Minneapolis City Hall.

New Music America events will be taking place at other Twin Cities sites—in the parks, in museums, and at such night spots as William's Pub, 2911 Hennepin Ave., and the Longhorn, 14 S. Fifth St., both in Minneapolis. In addition, special new music programs will be broadcast at night on KQRS and KTWN.

Other events related to the festival include meetings of the Music Critics Association of America and the New Music Alliance, a group of composers that organized the nation's first major new music festival last summer in New York.

New Music America is being coordinated by Nigel Reddin and Tim Carr of Walker Art Center in conjunction with The Minneapolis Star and with the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, which is providing accommodations for the visiting performers. The festival's expenses of about \$100,000 are being defrayed by grants from various local and national foundations.

THE WORLD IS ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF MUSIC, AND SOME OF IT IS BY COMPOSER MAX NEUHAUS

As high-minded composers go, Max Neuhaus is decidedly nonchalant about public reaction to his concerts. Earlier this month at the Cono Park Conservatory in St. Paul, Minn., he fiddled with a console, fine-tuned 64 speakers

around the botanical garden's great glass dome and then fled the scene as they began to generate stealthily quiet synthesized music round the clock. The concert continues today. It is as permanent as a piece of sculp-

ture, designed to please the visitor who chances to notice something in the air. "Leaving a piece of music to be discovered or not, that's my goal," says Neuhaus, a 40-year-old Texan. "The unexpected can make quite an impact."

He doesn't talk of compositions but of "discoverables," noting, "A lot of people think good sounds come only from Mother Nature or concert halls. I'm proving otherwise." Neuhaus, a leader of the new artistic school of environmental music, has installed his work in such unexpected places as a

Berlin swimming pool and a Times Square traffic island. His art is the musical counterpart of Christo's running fences and wrapped cliffs. Like Christo, he's been harassed as well as acclaimed for his pioneering efforts. In 1967 in Buffalo, when Neuhaus was placing short-range transmitters in trees (to broadcast to car radios), police showed up almost nightly to investigate reports of a prowler in the neighborhood.

For its big New Music America festival this month, the city of St. Paul commissioned the Neuhaus discover-

able in the conservatory. It took him five months to assemble, at a cost of \$45,000. He began by listening to the everyday noise of birdsong and echoing human voices, then wrote a computer program of complementary synthesized tones and rigged 64 small black speakers. Installed among the palms and banana plants, they transmit a subtle ping-pong that sounds like coins falling variously on glass and hardwood. The effect is serene and meditative. Unlike Muzak, Neuhaus' electronic creations are not obtrusive. "It's all up to the listener,"

Neuhaus says. To him, the botanical garden makes its own music, and his work merely brings out what's extraordinary about the ordinary. Another Neuhaus concert warbles night and day from a subway ventilation chamber at 46th Street and Times Square. It cost upwards of \$100,000; the Rockefeller Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts paid for the bulk of it.

In 1977, over National Public Radio, Neuhaus invited listeners to phone their local affiliates and whistle aimlessly; the 12,000 "whistles" were orchestrated into a two-hour concert. An earlier Neuhaus series brought ready underwater sounds to swimmers in 17 pools from Union, N.J. to Mount Pleasant, Mich.

Max's first concerts were family sings around the parlor upright in Beaumont. The son of a chemist father and a physical therapist mother, he played drums in a rock and jazz band as a teenager, then earned bachelor's and master's degrees at the Manhattan School of Music. In white tie and tails, he soloed as a percussionist and toured in ensembles led by conductor Pierre Boulez and composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. He cut an album of music for percussion and electronic tape for Columbia Masterworks. "Then I decided I didn't want to perform only for concertgoers," he says. A year as artist-in-residence among the electronics wizards at the Bell Telephone Labs in Murray Hill, N.J., whetted his ambition to wire the world for sound.

Now Neuhaus is looking for funds to change emergency sirens. He abhors the wailing and explains that pedestrians and drivers on city streets often mistake the direction an ambulance or fire engine is coming from. Officials in New York are interested in his proposal, believing it would help prevent accidents.

Neuhaus lives alone in a drafty loft in downtown Manhattan that was once a jewelry sweatshop. He works six days a week, taking Tuesdays off to browse through secondhand bookstores in search of vintage spy novels, which he collects.

Wherever he goes, sirens remind him of his work in progress. "Each time I start a new project, it seems on the surface to be totally impossible and implausible," Neuhaus says. "I never have any idea what lies before me. I just proceed positively." **PAT HREILLY**

Photograph by Giannetti/Hagen



By remote control, environmental composer Max Neuhaus adjusts the speaker console aloft in a St. Paul botanical garden.