

EVOS 9
Perth Australia
Nov. 1988

Larry Polansky

His views on experimental new music organisations

LARRY Polansky was in Perth for three days in September. We had hoped for Jody Diamond too, but she had visa problems and couldn't get out of Indonesia (where she is working on a Fulbright scholarship until mid-89). We hope she will be able to visit in July next year.

During his time here Larry gave a lecture/performance at PICA and conducted a workshop with the EYE (Evos Youth Ensemble). He did a lot of talking and we went after him with a tape recorder. The Open Ear will present a Larry Polansky show on Tuesday, November 8 (6UVS-FM at 11pm).

Larry has been heavily involved in the running of the Centre for Contemporary Music at Mills College, Oakland, since 1981. He is the founder of Frog Peak Music, a highly successful composers' collective devoted to the distribution and availability of experimental work. We were interested to hear his thoughts on the philosophy and practicalities of experimental new music organisations:

"In the States to get money you have to have a very long track record — you can't go to the N.E.A. (National Endowment for the Arts) unless you've been doing what you're doing for 5 years at least. You couldn't start an organisation and then to the N.E.A. and

tell them about your good intentions — they won't even look at you. Jody had A.G.I. (American Gamelan Institute) running for 8 years before she got just a few thousand dollars from the N.E.A. You have to do it all out of your own pocket, which is hard. It weeds out a lot of small organisations.

"When I started Frog Peak years ago I was so sick of hustling money from governments I said Frog Peak is never going to ask anyone for money. It'll either die or live purely by the fact of whether it's useful or not. And it's alive ... it's made me very poor! But I was writing 7 or 8 grant applications a year for the Centre (Centre for Contemporary Music, Mills College) and all for \$5,000. We'd do the seminar series and we were paying people \$100 a seminar — world-class people. Xenakis spoke at Mills for \$100. It's just a lot easier to ask if they'll do it for free. So Frog Peak is run just like any other business. I

don't have to answer to anybody. If I want to put money into a certain project I can do it — I don't have to justify it to anyone. And it's worked. We've managed to publish three or four books now and distribute a lot of people's work and also put on a lot of concerts. It's all been done with cash flow.

"I don't think you could do Evos like that because you have no way of bringing in income. But if you did, if you had a publishing arm, for example, or if you could put out cassettes or a journal ... but it's hard just to break even. I think having a home is nice, and some kind of network. A year's too short to build that up in a place that has no tradition of new music. People probably think, we'll go to the university and hear this concert that we hate, but these guys are all professors so it must be good music. We hate it but we're paying our dues. It takes a couple of years to become the alternative. I think you just have to stick with it and be consistent — we've dealt with this at Mills for 30 years. Sometimes nothing happens. Messiaen came out to Mills and played to 40 people. What do you do? What we've done is keep our publicity exactly the same every year. Every year we send out this giant poster and people know now that they keep that poster on their

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MUSIC — NON-MUSIC

Why is it important to get rid of the distinction?

"Anything that retards the decay of information is good. Anything that engenders the decay of information is bad. The more that information has to be diluted and made available to the lowest common denominator the worse it is and the less human beings tend to evolve. They tend to evolve upward — otherwise they devolve. If information is homogeneous and on a very low level society will devolve. Television is a good example. People don't improve by watching TV. It doesn't evolve society, it actually makes it worse. It makes people less perceptive, less aware. It teaches them and gives them practice in being unaware and thinking of things at a very base level.

So my feeling is that the more you retard the decay of information the more you are doing to evolve human beings towards a better state — whatever that state may be. The way I think about this notion of music and non-music is that any time you make a distinction that can only

exclude certain things from the realm of discussion you are hastening the decay of information.

When you say, this is music and this isn't music, what you've done is you've said nothing new — the things still exist as what they were but you have given everybody a simple and inaccurate tool for describing things in a way that they can just dismiss a whole half of things. If I say only the thing that takes place in the concert hall is music and everything else is not, people will simply close their ears. The idea won't occur to them that other sounds are beautiful. I think that hastens the decay of information. The real information is that all sounds are interesting and beautiful. The idea is that the human race naturally tends to deteriorate and does a lot of stupid things on a large scale. So anything you do that slows down that deterioration is good."

Larry Polansky