

# PERFORMING ARTS

## A Feast of New Music

Reviews  
Art Lines  
April 1983

The fashion today is that everything must be radical and new. They are not the same thing. "Radical" means a return to roots, and "new" means something that has never happened before. By these definitions, most of the music performed in Santa Fe last month was neither, some was one or the other, but a surprising amount was excellent.

An event that was interesting but neither radical nor new was the performance by Bay area, avant-garde composer Lou Harrison and the Mills College Gamelan. Following in the footsteps of Haydn, Pierre, De Falla and Satie, Harrison presented a puppet opera, *Richard Whittington*, utilizing a text by John Masfield, the gamelan, and voices. The flat shadow puppets, held up against a silken screen and lighted from behind, were traditional, but elsewhere Harrison cross-cultured with a vengeance. The only things new were the gamelan instruments which are now made in the U.S. They are aluminum which produces a lighter, brighter tone than the traditional instruments of brass and iron. But cross-cultural synthesis, no matter how consciously done, takes generations and many practitioners before it jells, as has happened in jazz. The gamelan is no exception.

What disappointed this listener was that the whole thing was so undeveloped. Harrison is a gifted composer, but with so magnificent an instrument, as well as adequate voices, he seems to have merely sketched instead of creating a fully realized work.

Oriental arts are in no hurry, traditional puppet shows often last from dusk to dawn, and there is little connection between their concepts of action, tension and release, and ours. *Richard Whittington* is more narrated than acted, and tended toward what we, with our saturated senses and television nurtured impatience, would call boring. Many of the patrons, who had laid out \$8, walked out.

"Sounds are excellent (of themselves)" said grand old composer of the avant-garde, John Cage. So they proved during *Tone Roads West*, the marathon poetry and music festival put together by Santa Fe composer Peter Garland, poet Arthur Sze and indefatigable administrator Suzanne Jamison. This was the first time an event of this nature has taken place in Santa Fe, and it is to be hoped the funding will be forthcoming to make it an annual bash. Of the five concerts given over four days, three were exciting. Honors were divided among Santa Fe composers Joseph Weber and Peter Garland, and Boston composer-violinist Malcolm Goldstein, making his first Southwestern appearance.

Weber is a lanky, flame-haired and bearded man in whom time and fortune have created some flame-like opinions and a certain bittersweet tension. Born in Antioch, California, he attended San Francisco State University, where his teacher was the composer Roger Nixon. His peers during the yeasty time of the '60s were such now recognized composers as Loren Rush, Steve Reich, and Pauline Oliveros.

The comparison will doubtless not please him, but Weber's performance of his own compositions on piano and the St. Francis Auditorium organ inevitably reminded me of the work of former Santa Fe/Taos composer Tom Ehrlich. There is the driving energy, the extended, marvelously arched line, the sonority. Weber gladly admits the influence of Debussy on his work, and the result is pure delight.

Driving energy is also evident in razor-thin, 30 year old Peter Garland, who may not make 40 unless he learns to pace himself. He is certainly full of passionate intensity, and his music is compelling. While his earlier piano/harp pieces are wonderfully lyrical, his more recent work, particularly *Matachin Dances* (played by Malcolm Goldstein and Lynn Case, with

Garland handling the gourd rattles), is one of the few really successful uses of "ethnic" materials by an "Anglo" composer.

Energy as pure delight is again applicable to the dazzling work of Malcolm Goldstein who flinches at being called a virtuoso. There is no doubt that he could

have had a more conventional career; it is our good fortune that he chose to devote himself to creating music rather than playing the standard repertory.

"Improvisation" is a loaded word, and Goldstein was careful to explain, in a wide-ranging discussion the day after his concert, that freedom does not mean anarchy. While the performer does have choice about what sound he will play at any given moments, the parameters of the piece are defined by the composer.

In this, Goldstein is literally radical but not new, in that sense of returning to roots. Baroque music is exactly composed, but with plenty of space for the creativity of the performer.

Goldstein's performance shone with an intensity and sonority that was totally satisfying, whether in his ensemble compositions, which included taped sounds and sometimes slide projections, or in the mesmerizing *Soundings*, in which Goldstein thoroughly explored the possibilities of the violin. One would not have been surprised to see flames coming out of the instruments, or his ears, or both!

Space limitations always dictate severe choices, and I have reserved little of it for the "stars" of *Tone Roads West*, poet/composer Jackson MacLow and poet Carolyn Forché. I felt it was more important to discuss New Mexico-based artists.

At 60, Jackson MacLow is still a searching, questing man, and he won all hearts when, during a discussion with Malcolm Goldstein, he reminded us: "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." If there are any rules to art, this is a cardinal one, and MacLow knows this to the marrow of his bones. The results, however, were equivocal. MacLow is noted for his explorations of verbal sounds divorced from conventional meaning. This is fascinating to the person who is doing it, but not usually transferable.

Carolyn Forché is a thoughtful and forceful person, as indicated by the talk she gave on El Salvador and in a smaller discussion on the same somber topic. I did

not hear her read because I was simply too exhausted. Mea culpa.

There is also little space to talk about the pride of poets from New Mexico who read. The most forceful was Joy Harjo who combined rhythmic vitality with non-cliche imagery. The gods be thanked, she did *not* read (as so many do) in one of those wispy, apologetic, high little girl voices that reminds one of Jackie Kennedy.

The final event of the Festival was a performance by Charles Amirhanian of Berkeley of a work utilizing tape, "music," text-sound, and projections by Carol Law. This reminded me of the chic/hip underground movies I used to see at the old Italian Hall in North Beach in the '50s. Not a cliché was missed. The money would have been much better spent to bring Pauline Oliveros or Kay Gardner to the Festival. While the organizers were careful to include a female poet at every reading, it still apparently did not occur to anybody that women write music.

*Tone Roads West* was preceded by the world premiere at C.G. Rein Gallery of Woody Vasulka's video "opera" *The Commission*.

The plot is operatic indeed: the 19th century composer Hector Berlioz was ostensibly commissioned to compose a work for the notorious violinist Niccolò Paganini who was very widely believed to be the devil. The commission turned out to be a fraud. Even more bizarre was the odyssey of Paganini's corpse, with which *The Commission* is largely concerned.

If music is "organized sound", as Edgard Varese averred, then *The Commissions* is a musical work. But it was more electronically manipulated chant and narrative. As with most endeavors in this field, because it was done by a person not principally a composer, it was peculiarly truncated and undeveloped; splendid opportunities to play with sound were allowed to slide by.

However, video is not basically sound but image. In *The Commission*, montage, crosscut, wipe, fade and computer manipulation of image were used to the hilt. The imagery was sometimes riveting, but just as often exhausting. No matter how accustomed one is to television commercials, scores and scores of images flashed rapidly upon the retina is overload.

— Joanne Forman

# Tone Roads at times confusing, always interesting

## Music review

By RICHARD  
BARRETT

### For The New Mexican

Tone Roads West, a festival dedicated to poetry and music, presented four days and nights of contemporary works ending Sunday. Many adjectives come to mind in trying to describe this amalgam of mediums. But words like avant-garde, surreal, pop and futuristic fail. Musically, everything from minimalist to 12th century organum (polyphony) was represented.

The works of Peter Garland and Joseph Weber, both pianists, represented the mainstream of contemporary music with roots in the classical tradition. The present style of this music is best described by the word "minimal." A short motive or subject is repeated (sometimes ad nauseum) with slight changes (variations) over an unspecified period of time. This modular form can be very successful if the core subject possesses energy and an intrinsic quality suited to this style. If not, it is no more interesting than shopping mall music.

Weber seemed to have the best grasp of this style. Wedding it to early forms of polyphony and variation (he has a vast knowledge of historical musical style), he created in his work "Labyrinth," a set of variations with tremendous energy.

His 1983 work for solo organ, "Fantasias, Organa, Dances and Hymns," show a great talent for spontaneous variation, so common among Baroque organists, but today it is all but lost. His keyboard technique, whether piano or organ, is dazzling.

Garland's work, while incorporating the same modular form, is of a much more somber form. Lacking the technical brilliance of Weber, they possess subtle timbres attained by sensitive instrumentation. His "Songs of Quetzalcoatl" used piano, harp and flute in a delicate evocation of the mystique of Mexico.

Poet Jackson Mac Low performed, with instrumental accompaniment, a sort of epic poem called "Instruments." Both voice and instruments combined

in alliterative form, not unlike that heard in the primate or aviary house of a zoo. Aggressive words, full of innuendo, such as "cartel," "narc," and "coed," gave this piece a humorous quality not unlike a Marx Brothers film.

His work, some call it "artistic anarchy," should not be confused with poetic text with musical accompaniment, but more a pure exploration of sound for its own sake. Instruments and voice, losing all common idiom, become one, neither dictating to the other.

Charles Amirkhanian and Carol Law collaborated in the most interesting of mixed mediums. Electronic sound, words and slides joined in surreal images, at times frightening, at times funny. Whether one can call this "art" is another matter. That one can call it a superb

representation of our age is beyond doubt.

A few Rorschach impressions follow: "Dog of Stravinsky," a parody of primal dog music; "Andas," childhood garage haunted houses; "Dutiful Ducks," a satire on committees; "Hypothetical Moments," a macabre portrayal of the masses; "Awe," a parody of astrology;

"History of Collage," is to be expected from such radical styles and forms. capsulated history of pedantic art; "Mahogany Ballpark," social alienation; "Church Car," the monotony of life in a machine age.

This festival, if at times confusing, was always interesting. My preconceived notions of performance and "art" were at times manifested as prejudice, but this

is to be expected from such radical styles and forms.

If this festival achieved nothing else, it was to make one think and ponder our immediate world. A trait conspicuous by its absence in the 20th century.

*The writer is music critic for The New Mexican.*

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# Program Offers Some Powerful Moments

By DAVID L. BELL  
Journal Correspondent

**T**one Roads West," last week's four-day symposium of poetry and new music sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts, was sufficiently serious to deserve serious attention.

The series was informed by an energetic and constructive emphasis on human interaction and on art as process rather than product.

There were high points of performance in video, music and poetry reading. And there was a pervasive, well-intentioned ideology about the affair that extended through art into politics to create a sense of involvement and commitment on the part of artists and audiences alike.

On the other side, there was the hermeticism that so often accompanies the avant-garde. More than once, labored poetic and musical passages seemed to convey nothing so much as a reinvention of the wheel.

And the shadow of political "a priori-ism" occasionally appeared to have had a stifling effect on the creative impulse, which functions most productively when the outcome is least predetermined.

"The Commission," a video "opera" by Woody Vasulka that opened the series, had its own pluses and minuses. Based on a historical episode involving the famous 19th century composer Hector Berlioz and violinist Niccolò Paganini, it sometimes followed and sometimes strayed from its story line.

The "plot" involved a prestigious but fraudulent commission offered to Berlioz for a composition. The offer was ostensibly made by Paganini but in fact by Berlioz's publisher as a publicity stunt. Such a vehicle might lend itself to the intense and romantic examination of human character that characterizes much traditional opera.

But the overall philosophical effect was more akin to the nihilism of punk art.

That is not to say that emotion was omitted. Rather,



it was invariably qualified so that enigma overshadowed affirmation or resolution. Yet there were vignettes of great power, some of them involving Paganini and his son, played respectively by Ernest Gusella and Ben Harris.

Visually, the high points of "The Commission" lay in Da Vinci-esque figure compositions on a grid, and in the electronic pointillism of landscape settings.

It may be that the apparent emotional hedging of the work had to do with the "experimental" nature of its structure. There seems to lurk behind the professed experimentalism and deliberate rawness of the video format a highly sophisticated visual aggressiveness nurtured by exposure to commercial television.

If "Tone Roads" video was tough as art, its music was no less so. Peter Garland, composer and music coordinator of the event, noted in the program, "Tone Roads (West or East): They may be a bit rough or rocky, but it is where they take you that counts. And on the most interesting ideas, one may just have to throw away the maps."

French composer Claude Debussy nevertheless served as mapmaker or guide to one of the series'

most effective musical composers and performers, Joseph Weber, whose untitled work for piano expressed a humble and honest, but not derivative, emulation.

Weber's "Labyrinth," also for piano, had the power of understated progression, while a longer piece for organ, "Fantasies, Organa, Dances & Hymns," seemed never to get anywhere — in the manner of a warm-up exercise. Once again, one sensed a holding back, a reluctance to take the leap and offer the resolution.

Of the poetry readings featured by "Tone Roads," it needs to be said that the power words may have when savored in solitude, or shared in the intimacy of a coffee house, bar or bookshop, is considerably diminished by presentation in an auditorium to persons seated on wooden benches.

One poet introduced a work with the comment that it would take 10 minutes to read, and it seemed to take 20. Liveliness of pace is essential to public performance, and only poets who read well should do so publicly.

Nor can paucity of vocabulary or image be concealed by an expressive voice. Content and delivery alike must be strong for a successful reading.

All criteria were more than met by Carolyn Forché, whose work was introduced with the apt observation that it shows "no seam between the personal and the political." In her El Salvador poems — "San Onofre, California" and "To Victoria Champagne" — Ms. Forché demonstrated the unifying and healing power of a view of the human condition that contains equal parts of compassion, protest and humor.

The closing performance of "Tone Roads West" was an intermedia work by Charles Amir Khanian and Carol Law. In its voice-on-voice passages, its "snore score" and its evocative juxtapositions of pedestrian sounds and images, it certainly had its moments — some of them just right and others overly prolonged. By its title, "Hypothetical Moments," it seemed to sum up the events of the four days that had preceded it.



Review

## 'New Music' Semantics

By JACK KOLKMEYER

The 1980s may well be known one day as The Age of Categories or The Era of Isms. It seems of paramount importance now that everything be labeled, boxed, stereotyped or categorically put in its own special niche. And nowhere, perhaps, is this "categorical imperative" more vigorous than in the field of music. Just look at the genres: classical, pop, R&B, rock 'n' roll, punk, country-Western, heavy metal, techno-pop, proto-punk, new wave, easy listening, salsa, reggae, funk, Motown and jazz, to name a few but barely scratch the surface.

This subject, the classification of musical genres, came up last weekend in regards to that strange beast known as New Music. Tone Roads West, a four-day marathon celebration of poetry and New Music sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts, brought together some of the biggest national names in New Music—Malcolm Goldstein, Charles Amirkhanian and Carol Law—and some of Santa Fe's most prominent New Musicians—Peter Garland, Joseph Weber, Jack Loeffler, Jack Brice and Jack Fishman. At the same time, a New Musician of a different stripe, Charlie Sexton, played with his group The Eager Beaver Boys at Club West. The happy coincidence of these two events provides an opportunity to tackle once again that perpetual question: What is New Music?

For some reason, the term New Music is coming more and more into vogue. Generally, it is used to refer to music of the avant-garde, whatever that is. Scholars consciously creating new musical modes, and ethnomusicologists discovering esoteric musical forms in the world's backwaters, have both been called New Musicians. How can these diverse activities be encompassed by a single term, New Music? (Though to take the term at its literal meaning, any music new to our ears—be it punk rock, new wave or reggae—should be considered New Music; but that would include, for instance, even Nigerian "juju" music, which is, in fact, very old.) Therefore, just for the fun of it—and to recognize those new music forms that have not been dignified with the rubric New

Music—I have come up with two subclassifications for New Music: Popular New Music and Classical New Music.

Popular New Music is social; it is music for work, play and dancing. Although it can be complex, it is not intrinsically intellectual. It is folkloric in origin, the music of the common people. When this ethnic music is brought to the attention of another culture, it becomes New Music. (Past examples of such New Music would be the blues, jazz, rock 'n' roll, salsa, reggae, rumba, tango, *sukisa* and high life—the list is infinite.) A current example of this fusion is the new wave group Bow Wow Wow, which makes use of Burundi drumming styles and mixes them with rock 'n' roll. In addition, these "borrowed" musical forms can undergo further evolution in their newly found land.

An electrifying example of the vitality of Popular New Music could be seen last weekend at Club West, with the appearance of young guitarist Charlie Sexton.

At 14, Sexton has already mastered many popular rock guitar styles, and he is destined to become a true innovator in the world of Popular New Music. His influences are clear, and he speaks of them with understanding. They include Carl Perkins, Johnny Burnette, Hound Dog Taylor and Bo Diddley, among others. (These are some of the same composers and performers whose sounds helped create the music of Elvis Presley, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.) Sexton is evolving rock 'n' roll in a fresh way, though he still pays homage to its old principles.

And this is the same dynamic at work in Classical New Music: Take the old tools, instruments and ideas and find something new to do with them. Classical New Music is based on an established set of artistic standards and traditions—one of them being that music is art, something to listen to and concentrate on. Often, too, Classical New Music is associated with an institution or a movement, be it a school of music or a school of thought. And Classical New Music, regardless of its content or presentation, almost always uses "classical" instruments—the piano, the violin, the sitar, the kora or the koto. These fundamental principles of

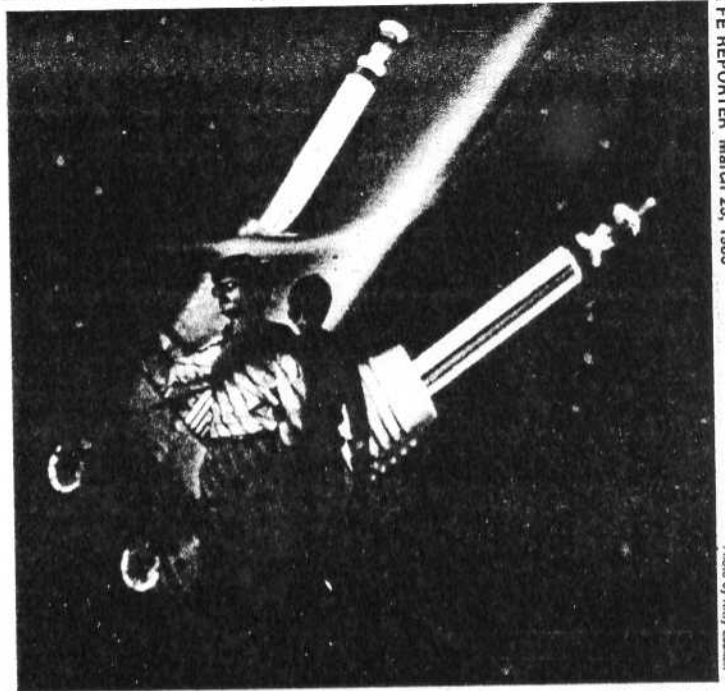


Photo by Kitty Laeken

Amirkhanian in front of a Carol Law image: A tribute to the potential of 'New Music'

Classical New Music were prominently displayed at Tone Roads West last weekend.

Malcolm Goldstein's performance of "Soundings for Solo Violin" last Saturday in the St. Francis Auditorium was both an exercise on expanding violin technique and a study in violin tonality. What Goldstein really presented was an idea about the nature of the instrument, and he did this with a great deal of enthusiasm and clarity.

Goldstein has worked mostly in New York during the past 20 years, and his music possesses a distinct urban intensity. It flows rapidly along classical violin traditions—Irish at one moment, Bulgarian at another.

The solo piece began with long, sustained notes that were at once pleasant and strident. The middle section focused on the

more energetic and repetitive possibilities of the violin. This diffused into a reverberating and melodic conclusion. What Goldstein was in the process of doing was discovering the other sounds a violin can make, creating a new role for a classical instrument.

One of his other presentations, "The Seasons: Vermont," was less successful. Perhaps because it came across so severely. Or perhaps because the taped sounds that accompanied it were too loud.

"The Seasons: Vermont" was performed by Goldstein on violin; Jack Loeffler on trumpet, recorder and steel drums; Jack Fishman on flutes; Peter Garland playing vibes, drums and gong; and Jack Brice on organ. Though they seemed to play well

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## The Poetics of Political Commitment

By STEPHEN LONG

Beginning—at the least—with the Vietnam years, political-activist poets have tended to be more activist than poetic. Recounting grisly details of multitudes of atrocities, these poets lost much of their effect through seeming to be hyperbolic, or, to bastardize Yeats badly, too much of their sorrow made a stone of our hearts. However, Carolyn Forché, who spent two years in El Salvador and escaped four attempts on her life by Salvadoran security forces, likewise escapes the atrocity litany, the trap of the political-activist poet.

The Santa Fe Council for the Arts' presentation, Tone Roads West, brought Forché to town for two days. Within a span of little more than 24 hours, Forché made four appearances: a lecture on El Salvador; a poetry workshop for women inmates at the state penitentiary; a lecture on exiled Salvadoran poet Claribel Alegria; and a reading from her award-winning second book of poetry, "The Country Between Us."

To be sure, Forché spoke of her share of horrors, as she had been instructed by her friend Josephine in a poem called "Return: "... Go try on / Americans your long, dull story / of corruption, but better to give / them what they want: Lil Milagro Ramirez, /

who after years of confinement did not / know what year it was, how she walked / with help and was forced to shit in public. / Tell them about the razor, the live wire, / dry ice and concrete, grey rats and above all / who fucked her, how many times and when."

Forché not only re-creates the experience, she creates a context, most often the unflinching memory of the victims or the witnesses.

Her lecture on El Salvador Friday night focused most closely on her particular area of expertise—the Salvadoran security forces. Pulling no punches in her denunciation of the leaders, she spoke in a carefully enunciated projected whisper whose nearly poetic cadence was filled with urgency. Listeners left St. Francis Auditorium stunned; not by the atrocities, but by the manner in which their own lethargy—and ultimately their complicity—had been stirred.

Saturday morning at the penitentiary, Forché again spoke of the passivity that has become part of the American character. "I have a sense that, on the whole, Americans are very moral people who want to do the right thing. But they feel powerless, they feel totally removed from the decision-making process in Washington.

"When I first went to Salvador, I felt that way, too. But the people told me I was

wrong. It is only because we believe that we have no power, that we actually don't have any. The powers that make the decisions that we silently oppose, rely on that lethargy and passivity," she remarked.

Forché urged the women at the penitentiary to write, to express themselves—not only in poetry, but in stories or journals. "You have a wealth of experience," she told them, "that might make people understand another side of life."

The 32-year-old Forché has been expressing herself in writing since she was 9. The oldest daughter in "a tool-and-die family" in Detroit, she was essentially apolitical until her trip to El Salvador. And that only came about when, after translating Alegria's poetry into English, she was visited by the older woman's nephew, who was an "out-of-his-mind revolutionary" and convinced her that a poet could have some impact on the world. "What I experienced there invaded my poetry. Now I go to Central America whenever I think I can get away with it," she said.

Much of her time in this country is spent lecturing wherever she is invited and lobbying in Washington against unconditional aid to the Salvadoran government. But she insists that it is the poetry reading and not her

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Photo by Stephen Long

Forché: The death of apathy

# Commitment

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politicking that has the greatest impact for change. "People who come to the lectures are already interested in Salvador. But those who come for the poetry are often people who know nothing about Salvador."

Almost like a challenge, she added, "You'll see it this evening: The poetry reaches people in a way that talking about my experiences can't."

That night she was introduced by local poet Arthur Sze, who organized the poetry program of Tone Roads West. Casual and confident, Forche read a few announcements before beginning in a startlingly contrasting mode—after 24 hours of utter seriousness, she revealed a sparkling sense of humor.

Introducing the first poem, "As Children Together," she recalled her well-endowed, French-Canadian adolescent friend, Vicki Champagne (she promises that's her real name), a girl who dated servicemen because "she got blue airmail letters from them and didn't have to do anything with them." (Like most of Forche's work, this poem is concerned with memory.) Forche ends the poem by addressing her French-Canadian girlfriend directly: "If you read this poem, write to me. / I have been to Paris since we parted."

Her audience firmly in tow, Forche then turned to the Salvadoran poems. Reading, or speaking from memory, she intoned her poems in the same slightly theatrical voice of the previous night's lecture. She seemed to be letting each individual person in on a very intimate secret.

What she had said that afternoon was true: Her poetry was even more effective than the lecture. People didn't applaud—it would be like applauding a prayer—nor did they even turn to their companions to speak. Instead, they accepted the relationship they had been drawn into between the poet and the listener, as Forche made tangible for them the pain of a war-torn country.

Before bracketing her Salvadoran poem with another upbeat one, she offered a chilling non-Salvadoran poem, "Ourselves or Nothing." Speaking for herself and the audience, she described the plight of the individual who chooses to become involved: "There is a cyclone fence between / ourselves and the slaughter and behind it / we hover in a calm protected world like / netted fish, exactly like netted fish. / It is either the beginning or the end / of the world, and the choice is ourselves / or nothing."

Like Salvador to her, Forche's poetry had invaded our lives.

## 'New Music'

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together, many of the group's smaller sounds and tones could not be heard well. But when they could be, the music they played proved to be rich.

The four seasons have always been a favorite classical theme, and certainly an easily understood subject. Perhaps this piece needed to venture further into the experimental possibilities of the instruments being played. Still, there was a great deal of musical restraint on the part of the musicians. Nevertheless, it was an interesting involvement of local musicians with a Classical New Music performer of national significance.

On Sunday night, Charles Amirkhanian and Carol Law closed the New Music portion of Tone Roads West, and it turned out to be a fitting tribute to the brilliant potential of New Music. Though they fracture almost all of the rules, there remains a refined, classical undertone and motivation to their work.

Their collaborative effort, "Hypothetical Moments," was, without doubt, a tour de force. Both visually and vocally this

# U.S. Poet Speaks On Life in Salvador

By MARIA HIGUERA  
Journal Staff Writer

SANTA FE — Carolyn Forche left El Salvador in 1980, after escaping an ambush by three machine gunners and other threats to her life.

Her Salvadorean friends, among them Archbishop Oscar Romero, urged her to leave the country to save her life.

Ms. Forche, 32, a poet and journalist, bypassed El Salvador in January during a trip to Central America.

Says Ms. Forche, who now lives in New York: "I'm not a guerrilla. I can see that I'm most effective as a writer, as an artist, as someone who can serve as a witness. Dead, I'm useless."

She arrived in Santa Fe on Friday to take part in Tone Roads West, a festival of contemporary poetry and music that runs through Sunday at St. Francis Auditorium.

On Friday she lectured on El Salvador. Today at 3 p.m., she will discuss her translations of Salvadorean poetry. She will read her own poems at 7 p.m.

Much of Ms. Forche's work, including a memoir in progress, is inspired by events in the tiny, war-torn country. She spent nearly two years there, from 1978 to 1980, developing what she calls "a focused obsession."

In January, she went to Mexico City to comfort an exiled friend because her two teen-age daughters had been picked up and tortured by government police, Ms. Forche said.

The girls, 15 and 17, were relatively lucky, Ms. Forche said. They survived.

Several of Ms. Forche's friends, including Archbishop Romero, were less fortunate. The archbishop warned her about her safety a week before he was killed saying mass.

Of Romero, she said, "I knew I was in the presence of a saint."

Ms. Forche, an estranged Roman Catholic, said, "The faith of Salvadoran Catholics restored me. I met

and knew those who have since become martyrs."

Military aid, such as the Reagan administration's latest request for \$110 million, can only prolong the violence, she said.

"I don't think a military victory is possible," she said. "The cost in human lives would be unimaginable."

Since she can't realistically expect military aid to be cut off completely, she said negotiations should be a condition of any increase.

Her recent lectures focus on corruption in the Salvadoran military.

"The institutionalized corruption of the military should be of concern to Americans, because of the millions of dollars we funnel through it," she said.

She can rattle off examples to illustrate her point. For instance, she told of a colonel who was arrested by plainclothes policemen in New York for trying to sell them 10,000 machine guns. "I leave it to people to figure out where the machine guns came from," she said.

Ms. Forche's articles have appeared in *The Nation*, *Ms.*, *The Progressive* and *The American Poetry Review*.

Her first book of poems, *Gathering the Tribes*, won the Yale Younger Series of Poets Award in 1976. She has since received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Atlantic Monthly*.

A poet first, she said she became a journalist in El Salvador: "What I was witnessing made me feel the moral obligation to report it. I didn't think it could be done in poetry."

She describes her upbringing in Detroit as patriotic, Catholic and working-class. Once she started college, during the Vietnam War, her politics changed to become what she calls, "morally based politics."

Journal Staff  
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# REPORTING THE ARTS



Composer Malcolm Goldstein



Performance artist Amirkhanian

## Artfest for the Avant-Garde

Here in Santa Fe we've got festivals for everything: for opera, for chamber music, for theater, for the visual arts, for film (both the Hollywood and independent varieties) and dance. Any art form, it seems, as long as it's "safe," accessible, reassuring, risk-free and given the nod of approval by highbrow culture vultures and academically trained critics, can find favor in Santa Fe.

The question that the Santa Fe Council for the Arts is now asking, however, is this: Can a four-day festival of avant-garde or politically inspired art—consisting mostly of new music, poetry and performance—find favor in the same town that supports an opera and a chamber music festival? Will the same people that flock to hear Stravinsky and Copland rush off to hear Jackson MacLow, Malcolm Goldstein, Charles Amirkhanian, Carol Law, Carolyn Forche and a pantheon of local talents?

Unfortunately, the Council won't know the answer to this question until its festival, **Tone Roads West: Poetry and New Music**, is over, sometime late Sunday night. Until then it can only hope that Santa Feans are going to welcome the chance to see some of the most important, innovative new musicians and poets in the country perform together in a loosely structured way that encourages the exchange of ideas.

**Tone Roads West**, whose title comes from a particularly evocative Charles Ives composition, "Tone Roads," was the brainchild of Suzanne Jamison, administrator of the Santa Fe Council for the Arts and overall coordinator of the festival, which will run from Thursday, March 17, to Sunday, March 20, in the **St. Francis Auditorium**. "The idea was to provide a structure that would bring together exceptional, creative people and let them interact with each other," Jamison said. "Then, watch the dynamics take place!"

Santa Fe has long been a center of new music, thanks to the work of composer, musician and music publisher Peter Garland and composers Joseph Weber, Gardner Jencks, Tom Ehrlich and others, and it has been home for poets for the past 50 years. The festival, then, is really a call for national

luminaries and local talents to "come together."

The local poets who are answering this call are: Arthur Sze (who also is functioning as the festival's poetry coordinator), John Brandi, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Joy Harjo, Floyce Alexander, Jimmy Baca, Simon Ortiz, Luci Tapahonso, Carol Cellucci, Harold Littlebird, Leo Romero and Nathaniel Tarn. The New Mexico new music scene will be represented by Garland (who is the music coordinator of the festival) and Joseph Weber. The nationally acclaimed artists who responded to the call are the poets Jackson MacLow and Carolyn Forche, composer Malcolm Goldstein and performance artists Charles Amirkhanian and Carol Law.

Forche, a journalist and human rights activist as well as a poet, has traveled extensively in El Salvador, translated the poetry of Salvadoran poet Claribel Alegria, and testified before Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists on human rights violations in that troubled country. Her first book of poetry, "Gathering of the Tribes," won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award in 1976. Her second work, "The Country Between Us," dealing with El Salvador, ranks as one of the most discussed volumes of poetry in years. Writing in the February issue of *American Poetry Review*, Sharon Doubiago said of "The Country Between Us": "This is a poetry of terrible witness." In addition to her poetry reading with Jackson MacLow on Saturday at 7 p.m., Forche will also deliver a free public lecture on El Salvador on Friday at 7 p.m.

MacLow, now 60, might be called the grand old man of the early-60s avant-garde poetry scene. He is credited with giving impetus to the Fluxus Movement in literature by publishing "An Anthology" in 1963. In the late '60s he participated in the creation of computer-assisted poetry for the art and technology program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His innovative experiments with chance language, so reminiscent of the work of the dadaists of the '20s, are exemplified in "22 Light Poems." His

most recent works are "Representative Works" and "From Pearl Harbor Day to FDR's Birthday." MacLow, who had performed with John Cage, will be seen this weekend with composer Malcolm Goldstein on Friday at 8:15 p.m. On Sunday, he and Goldstein will conduct a discussion, **Poetry and New Music Collaboration**, at 2 p.m.

Goldstein is one of the foremost composer and violinists of the avant-garde today. He has been active, mostly in New York, since the early '60s and has pioneered new performance techniques and inspired new improvisational attitudes in music. Besides appearing with MacLow in concert Friday night and in discussion with him Sunday afternoon, Goldstein will premiere a new work with an ensemble of Santa Fe musicians called "The Seasons: Vermont/Winter, Vermont/Spring" on Saturday at 9:30 p.m.

The team of Charles Amirkhanian and Carol Law will round out the list of guest artists. Amirkhanian, long-time music director of radio station KPFA in Berkeley, Calif., is the country's leading "text-sound" composer, a genre that combines the elements of music and poetry. Amirkhanian mixes verbal information with tape loops, multitrack recording techniques and digital modulation to produce startling aural images. His partner, Law, works as a visual artist—indeed, she's been called one of the most unorthodox and exciting visual artists in the Bay Area—and is involved in printmaking, blueprinting and the use of color copiers. In her work with Amirkhanian, Law will create mobile images by manipulating slides, projectors and a slide-dissolve unit of her own design. This duo will wind up the four-day festival with a program called "Hypothetical Moments," which will be performed at 8:30 p.m. Sunday.

A series ticket for all 12 concerts, readings and discussions costs \$30. Single tickets, which will only be available at the door, will range in price from \$4 to \$8, depending on the nature of the event. The \$30 series ticket, however, will not cover the special benefit premiere of video artist Woody Vasulka's video opera, "The Commission," which will be shown at 7:30 p.m. at C.G. Rein Gallery. Tickets for this event are \$8. For tickets or more information about **Tone Roads West**, call the Santa Fe Council for the Arts at 988-1878.

# Poet-activist criticizes

## Salvadoran rulers

By **ROBERT STOREY**  
The New Mexican Staff

Opponents of a Reagan administration plan to step up military aid to El Salvador say they may not be able to block the increase but hope Congress will reduce the amount and require negotiations with rebel groups.

"We know there is a difference between what people believe morally and what they can achieve politically," said human rights activist and award winning poet Carolyn Forche on Friday evening.

"Personally I would like to see all aid to the Salvadoran government stopped overnight, but that is politically impractical. What we'd like to see and what we think is achievable is a requirement on the aid bill

that the government be required to negotiate," she said.

Forche said that when she was in El Salvador she witnessed brutality, oppression of the peasants and government corruption.

She lectured to about 120 people gathered in the St. Francis Auditorium in an event sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts and the Santa Fe chapter of Clergy and Laity Concerned.

Her hour-long lecture was part of Central America Week, a nation-wide observance which began Friday.

Forche said the major problem in El Salvador, which is locked in a bitter civil war, is that the corrupt government is run by a small military clique.

The current struggle has cost the lives of at least 40,000 civilians caught in the middle between right-wing military groups and guerrillas, she said.

A few years ago, the Salvadoran officer corps numbered only about 5,000, out of a national population of about 5 million.

However, most presidents elected in the past 50 years have been backed by the military.

"You need to understand that it is not the individual persons who are in office or who are in authority who run El Salvador, it is the system which runs the country," Forche said.

A military background and attitude is instilled in El Salvador's ruling class from early childhood, she said. After at-

tending military academies where early ties and loyalties are established, El Salvadoran officers may serve for 20 years in a carefully controlled and developed system before receiving their chance at power.

Forche claimed that for the past 20 years, military leaders have been siphoning off both economic and military aid for their own use. They also have developed an extensive system of corruption dependent on continued U.S. aid, she charged.

"I've talked with many different American advisers in Salvador, and many of them have the attitude about the government that they may be bastards, but at least they are our bastards," she said.



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If you're one of millions who have come to regard television as the most trivial of media, Woody Vasulka may open your eyes to its creative potency in the hands of a true craftsman.

His new video opera, *The Commission*, received its world premiere Wednesday at the C. G. Rein Gallery in a benefit performance for the Tone Roads West music and poetry festival.

The opera, a true collaborative creation, recounts the macabre story of Paganini in his last years. The epilogue tells of 30 subsequent years before his shabbily embalmed body reaches its final resting place.

The textual music of Paganini and Berlioz was created and performed by Ernest Gusella and Robert Ashley, respectively.

Our physical revulsion toward these gruesome details is mitigated by the humor of Ashley's marvelously irreverent recreation of Berlioz, which he somewhere between Sam Ervin and Bob Dylan. Gusella's Paganini is a tortured, Christ-like figure who communicates through his 10-year-old son, placidly portrayed by Ben Harris.

*The Commission* is a powerful, exquisitely crafted work. I doubt that many of Wednesday's audience of 125 will soon forget Paganini's bizarre tale, and some of us are hungry to know more.

Rasatiempo - New Mexican  
3/14/83



Carolyn Forche

Rasatiempo - New Mexican  
3/14/83

Her talk in the St. Francis Auditorium of the Museum of Fine Arts is being co-sponsored by the Santa Fe Council of the Arts' Tone Roads West festival and by Clergy and Laity Concerned.

Forche's latest book of poems, *The Country Between Us*, grew from her experiences as a journalist and human rights observer in El Salvador. She recently returned from a month in Central America.

On Saturday, Forche will lecture on the work of Salvadoran poet Claribel Alegria at 3 p.m. and will read from her own work at 7 p.m., also in St. Francis Auditorium.

For information, call the Arts Council at 988-1878.

## El Salvador strife focus of poet's lecture

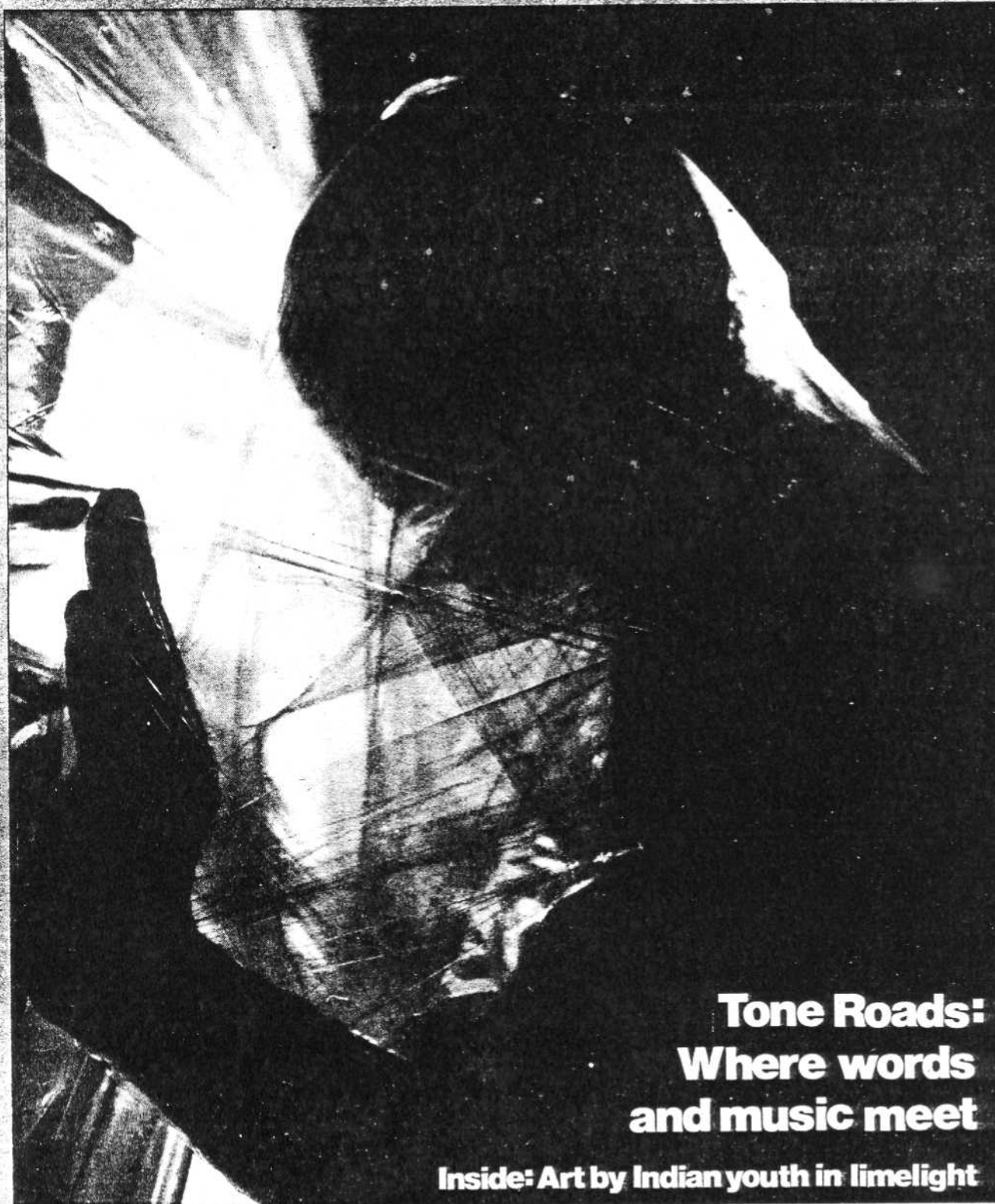
Poet Carolyn Forche will give a free lecture at 7 p.m. today on the current bloodshed in El Salvador.

The New Mexican

# Pasatiempo

A guide to the arts, entertainment & recreation

March 11, 1983



**Tone Roads:  
Where words  
and music meet**

**Inside: Art by Indian youth in limelight**

# Festival celebrates poetry, new music

By JON BOWMAN  
The New Mexican Staff

Poetry is seldom viewed as a public art. We go out to concerts, films, plays and dance performances, but usually stay at home, next to a blazing fireplace and a bottle of wine, when we're in the mood for poetry.

Poets themselves are seen as kin to hermits. Some may scribble their lines at the local bistro, but in the popular view, the best poets work by candle-light in the wee hours of the night, closed off to the world.

*Tone Roads West*, sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts, probably won't change all our ingrained stereotypes about poets and their writings.

It promises, however, to be the most visible, public celebration of poetry yet to be seen in this town.

The four-day festival, which opens Thursday, also will expose Santa Feans to a wide range of new American music, the kind often said to be on the cutting edge.

The seed for *Tone Roads West* was sown a year ago when five regional poets and Santa Fe composer Peter Garland joined together for a public presentation at St. John's College.

Calling themselves "the Verse Squad," the poets found they had much in common with Garland. Through the collaboration, their poetry and music gained a new, shared dimension — and a wider audience than either might receive alone.

*Tone Roads West* also will be a joint venture, but on a much grander scale.

Twelve New Mexico poets and two prominent poets from out-of-state — Carolyn Forché and Jackson Mac Low — will participate in the festival, based at St. Francis Auditorium.

Composers will have strong representation, performing their own works in nightly concerts. In some cases, poets and composers will share the stage, attempting to meld words with music.

Suzanne Jamison, executive director of the Arts Council, said the festival will be the first in Santa Fe — and one of only a handful anywhere — to combine the two art forms.

"It just seemed to me it was time to do something like this — to put the different people together and see how they develop," she said.

Another goal of the festival, she said, is to allow area poets and composers to rub elbows with more widely-known artists from outside New Mexico.

"When you bring in people from out of town, that's a valid thing to do," she said. "But when you bring people in, there needs to be a way for them to interact with the people in the town, so when they leave, they leave something behind."

Although *Tone Roads West* will explore the links between poetry and music, development of the festival program was entrusted to two people, representing each of the featured art forms.



*Tone Roads West* poetry coordinator Arthur Sze



Music coordinator Peter Garland, left, with composer Joseph Weber

Garland served as music coordinator and Arthur Sze organized the poetry events.

Garland said the festival — with five concerts planned over its four-day span — will offer "the biggest amount of contemporary music I've ever seen in a small space of time in New Mexico."

The emphasis will be on non-commercial and experimental music, including two nights of original works by Garland and Santa Fe composer Joseph Weber. In addition, concerts will be given by composer/violinist Malcolm Goldstein of Vermont, poet Mac Low and San Francisco-based performance artists Charles Amir-khanian and Carol Law. (see accompanying schedule for times and places).

Garland described Goldstein as "one of the premier violinists of the avant-garde" and a champion of improvisational playing techniques.

Goldstein's first appearance at the festival will be next Friday, March 18, when he will perform with Mac Low, a close friend.

Goldstein's major concert will be next Saturday, March 19. At that time, he will direct an ensemble of Santa Fe musicians in the world premiere of his *The Seasons: Vermont/Winter Vermont/Spring*, which he has been working on for more than a decade. He also will perform his solo piece *Martin's Song, Illuminated* and a piece called *Soundings*.

"It's going to be a very ambitious program," Garland said.

Amirkhanian and Law will close out the festival next Sunday, March 20, with a performance of their work, *Hypothetical Moments*.

Garland said the performance will involve not only live music, but the use of multiple projectors, taped sounds and other media. "It sort of crosses over the realm into performance theater," he said.

Sze said the poetry programs will be equally eclectic, bringing together poets from different ethnic backgrounds with varying styles and concerns.

"I think there's a lot of strong poetry going on and it's multi-cultural," he said. "My overall goal was to draw on the talents in New Mexico. Rather than think of them as individual voices, I wanted to play different writers against each other. I think there's more music in that."

The festival will open Thursday with a poetry reading, involving Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, John Brandi, Joy Harjo and Sze, all working in New Mexico.

Two other readings will feature poets from the state. On Saturday, March 19, Floyce Alexander, Jimmy Santiago, Simon Ortiz and Luci Tapahonso will join together. The following day, a collective reading will be given by Carol Cellucci, Harold Littlebird, Leo Romero and Nathaniel Tarn.

"Most of us know each other," Sze said. "I tried to select the best as well

as a few voices I think deserve to be heard."

The visiting poets participating in the festival — Mac Clow and Forche — will make several appearances.

Forche, who formerly lived in Taos, has traveled extensively in El Salvador as a journalist and human rights advocate. Her book of poems, *The Country Between Us*, whose imagery is rooted in Forche's Salvadoran ex-

periences, was the Lamont Selection of the Academy of American Poets in 1981.

Mac Low has been a poetic innovator for years, experimenting with the chance use of language, distortion of syntax and blending of poetry with other art forms, including dance, music and painting. His major appearance here will be his collaboration with musician Goldstein.



Photo by Marcia Mikulak

Cosimo Corsano as *The Mortician* in Woody Vasulka's video work

## Experimental video opera to be unveiled at benefit

*The Commission*, a long-awaited video opera by Santa Fean Woody Vasulka, will receive its premiere Wednesday as a benefit for *Tone Roads West*, the poetry and new music festival.

The video work will be shown at 7:30 p.m. at C.G. Rein Gallery, 122 W. San Francisco. Tickets are \$8.

Vasulka will be joined by poets and composers participating in *Tone Roads West* at the showing. Afterwards, refreshments will be served.

*The Commission* is an experimental work, inspired by a historic event involving the French composer Hector Berlioz and Niccolò Paganini — superstar violinist of the 19th century.

As the video opera unfolds, a fraudulent commission is given to the

### On the cover

This week's cover was designed by Mona Kay using a Marcia Mikulak photograph of Bradford Smith's sculpture/set for Woody Vasulka's video work *The Commission*.

then-unknown Berlioz. It is supposedly from Paganini, whom the composer adores. In fact, the whole deal is a publicity stunt staged by Berlioz's publisher.

*The Commission* delves into Paganini's extraordinary life and bizarre character. The work is not strictly a historical narrative, however. At times, it takes a decisive turn toward the abstract.

The cast includes local and national figures. Composer Robert Ashley portrays Berlioz, while video artist Ernest Gusella appears as Pa-

ganini and Ben Harris as his son. Cosimo Corsano plays the Mortician and Andrea Harris is heard as *The Voice*.

The Czechoslovakian-born Vasulka and his wife and co-worker, Steina, produced *The Commission* with funding assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts and New Mexico Arts Division.

The two are pioneers in experimental video. In the 1960s, they founded *The Kitchen* in New York, one of the country's most widely known alternative performing spaces.

## Four-day Tone Roads a first for Santa Fe

Here is the schedule of events for *Tone Roads West*, Santa Fe's first joint poetry and new music festival. All events will take place at the St. Francis Auditorium, except where noted. Tickets are \$4 for poetry readings, \$5 for concerts and \$2 for lectures, available at the door. Series passes also may be purchased for \$30 by calling the Santa Fe Council of the Arts, 988-1878.

### Wednesday, March 16

Woody Vasulka's video opera *The Commission* will receive its premiere in a benefit for the festival, 7:30 p.m., at C.G. Rein Gallery, 122 W. San Francisco. Admission \$8.

### Thursday, March 17

Poetry reading — featuring Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, John Brandi, Joy Harjo and Arthur Sze, 7 p.m.  
New music concert — Works by Santa Fean Joseph Weber, including *Labyrinth* and an untitled piece for solo piano and the premiere of *Fantasies*, *Organa*, *Dances* and *Hymns* for the St. Francis organ.

### Friday, March 18

Lecture — on El Salvador by poet and human rights advocate Carolyn Forche. Co-sponsored by Clergy and Laity Concerned. 7 p.m. Free.  
Performance — Poet Jackson Mac Low accompanied by violinist Malcolm Goldstein, 8:15 p.m.  
New music concert — Works by Santa Fean Peter Garland, including *Three Dawns*, *The Songs of Quetzalcoatl* and *Matachin Dances*, 9:30 p.m.

### Saturday, March 19

Poetry reading — featuring Floyce Alexander, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Simon Ortiz and Luci Tapahonso, 1 p.m.

Lecture: Carolyn Forche will discuss the work of Salvadorean poet Claribel Alegria, 3 p.m., in the Museum of Fine Arts Conference Room.

Poetry reading — featuring Carolyn Forche and Jackson Mac Low, 7 p.m.  
New music concert — Malcolm Goldstein with ensemble performing *The Seasons*:



Photo by Anne Tardos

Jackson Mac Low  
Vermont/Winter, Vermont/Spring, *Soundings* and *Marin's Song*, *Illuminated*.

### Sunday, March 20

Discussion — a poetry and new music collaboration, with Malcolm Goldstein and Jackson Mac Low, 2 p.m., in the Museum of Fine Arts Conference Room.  
Poetry reading — featuring Carol Cellucci, Harold Littlebird, Leo Romero and Nathaniel Tarn, 6 p.m.  
New music performance — Charles Amirkhanian and Carol Law will do *Hypothetical Moments*, a performance piece using tape, music, text, projectors and an ensemble, 8:30 p.m.



Photo by Antaramian

Violinist/composer Malcolm Goldstein

## Arts-Entertainment



Sculpture/Set in 'The Commission'



Malcolm Goldstein To Lead Musical Ensemble; Some Say He's 'Reinvented Violin Playing'

## 'Tone Roads' Lead To Creative Encounter

Tone Roads West: Poetry and New Music, will take place at St. Francis Auditorium in Santa Fe, March 17-20. Tickets to individual events are available through the Santa Fe Council for the Arts, 109 Washington Ave. A \$30 series ticket is also available.

By K.C. COMPTON  
Journal Arts Writer

For four days this month, poets and musical pioneers will converge in Santa Fe for what promises to be a fascinating, if not necessarily sensible, convocation of the musical and literary.

"Tone Roads West: Poetry and New Music," sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts, will feature poetry reading, new music concerts, lectures by poets and musicians of national and international reputation and the world premiere of a video opera.

The festival will open with the premiere of "The Commission," a video opera by Santa Fe/Czech video artist Woody Vasulka. The opera, with sets designed by sculptor Bradford Smith and camera work by Steina Vasulka, is about a commission Hector Berlioz received to compose a work for Paganini, and which later turned out to be fraudulent. (Did Verdi begin thus? Does this make sense? Does it need to? Remember, this is opera.)

The fare being offered is a Duke's mixture of the middle and highbrow, with a heavy leaning toward the avant-garde. If Rudyard Kipling is still your favorite poet and Lawrence Welk is your idea of the consummate musician, you may be in for quite an adventure. In fact, even if e.e. cummings and Bartok are more your style, you may be in for a challenge.

—“**W**hen Copland's music first came out, the musicians looked at it and said it was impossible. Now, With thousands of performances behind them, it seems quite acceptable.”

Take for instance violinist/composer Malcolm Goldstein. He will direct an ensemble of Santa Fe musicians in the world premiere of his "The Seasons: Vermont/Winter Vermont/Spring."

An article in *The Village Voice* stated that Goldstein had "reinvented violin playing." Whether that is true is open to debate. A quick look at the scores to his music leaves little doubt that he has, at least, added a new wrinkle or two to the art of writing musical scores.

His scores indicate rhythmic patterns, textures and duration through a variety of symbols, such as a map of the rivers in his native Vermont which serves as the musical score to "The Seasons."

Music coordinator Peter Garland is a composer of experimental music himself and he fairly bristles at the suggestion that such work may be intellectual

noodling. It is different, he will admit. But so, a few years ago, was Aaron Copland's music.

"One of the reasons it is hard to understand and hard to play is that there is no performance tradition," Garland said. "When Copland's music first came out, the musicians looked at it and said it was impossible. Now, with thousands of performances behind them, it seems quite acceptable."

Experimentation seems to have less emphasis on the poetry side of the program. Poetry coordinator Arthur Sze, himself the recipient of several awards and fellowships, said he selected 12 New Mexican poets to read their work. The group includes Native Americans Simon Ortiz, Joy Harjo, Luci Tapahonso and Harold Littlebird; Chicano writers Leo Romero and Jimmy Santiago Baca; Chinese-American poets Sze and Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge; as well as culturally unidentified Nathaniel Tarn, Carol Cellucci, John Brandi and Floyce Alexander.

"Because we have a strong writing community here, I tried to select people who represent this multi-cultural group," Sze said. "One of the things I wanted to do, because most of us are well known to local audiences and do a lot of solo readings, was to present a group of different voices. So, instead of having one poet read I am putting four together at one time and we'll play the voices against each other."

Political poet Carolyn Forché is one of two nationally acclaimed poets who will participate in the series. She has received fellowships from the Gug-

Continued on C-4

# 'Tone Roads' Lead To Creative Encounter

Continued From C-1

genheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and has published two award-winning books of poetry, "Gathering the Tribes" and "The Country Between Us."

Forché has travelled extensively in El Salvador as a journalist and will give a talk about human rights. She will also lecture on the work of Claribel Alegria, a Salvadoran poet, and read her poetry.

"Carolyn Forché is a good strong voice," Sze said. "I think she will add a lot of dimension to this. The other guest poet, Jackson MacLow, is a composer and performance artist as well as a writer. He was pivotal in this event because we aren't just doing a poetry festival or a music festival.

"We are going to have music mixed with poetry and performance, and then people who are interested in poetry might have a chance to hear new music and vice versa. And since MacLow has been doing these concert and poetry readings for years, I feel he is sort of a bridge between the two."

MacLow, an experimental poet, is the only avant-garde writer among the poets. The musicians and composers, however, more than make up for the poets' traditionalism.

"My idea in selecting the composers and musicians for 'Tone Roads West' was to bring together half local and half out-of-town artists to showcase the strong emerging local talent with recognized artists from other parts of the country. Part of my criteria was to try and select people who crossed the boundaries between literature and music," Garland said.

"For instance, Charles Amirkhanian uses text material almost exclusively for his musical material. He works with tape recorders and instead of playing notes on instruments, he uses bits of text and words to make music. Very much in the tradition of Gertrude Stein and some of the French Dadaists."

Amirkhanian and his wife Carol Law, a visual artist, work in a relatively new intermedia field known as performance art. They combine music, slide projectors, lighting, tape recorders and sundry other materials into what the festival organizers say is "a closing night spectacle."



# REPORTING THE ARTS



## An Instrument of Infinite Complexity

By KEN AUSUBEL

Editor's note: Santa Fe resident Woody Vasulka is a nationally known video artist and, along with his wife and co-worker Steina, is a pioneer in the field of video art and computer video. Born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1937. Vasulka studied metal technology and hydraulic mechanics at the state school of industrial engineering. Then he entered the film-making program at the prestigious Academy of Performing Arts in Prague where he began to produce and direct short films. In 1965 he emigrated to the United States and worked in New York City as a free-lance film editor for several years.

In 1967 he began to experiment with electronic sounds, stroboscopic lights and video. In 1974 he was appointed associate professor in the Center for Media Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo. At this time he began his experiments with computer-generated and computer-manipulated video images, which resulted in the construction of what has now become known as The Valsulka Imaging System.

On Wednesday, March 16, Vasulka's newest work, a video opera titled "The Commission," will receive its world premiere at the C.G. Rein Gallery in Santa Fe. Based loosely on the life of Niccolo Paganini, the legendary 19th-century violinist, "The Commission" marks the first time that Vasulka has applied his video-imaging techniques to a narrative structure.

The following interview was excerpted from a longer one conducted by Santa Fe video-maker, Ken Ausubel.

**Ausubel:** Were you always interested in machines?

**Vasulka:** My father had a workshop and was a metal worker. I grew up during the war in Czechoslovakia. We lived across from an airfield. My first interest as a kid was to take machines apart. I was lucky living close to the airport because I could take the most complicated machines of that era—the German fighter planes—and play with them. My youth was spent in these graveyards of airplanes. You could find everything there that would drive your fantasy crazy. Europe was a huge junkyard after the war; you could find everything from human fingers to weapons in the dump. As kids, we roamed through it. This basically set the scene.

Eventually I began to realize—here let me paraphrase Korean video-maker Nam June Paik—that if you make a simple tool, you'll use it for a while like a child uses a simple toy, then throw it away, because you will outgrow the challenge. But if you can make a tool that is infinitely complicated, it will fascinate you for the rest of your life. What I've been trying to do is to invent tools that contain more mystery than I could possibly imagine. That's what characterizes our better tools—this ability to be inspired by the tool rather than being served by it.

**Ausubel:** How did you get into video?  
**Vasulka:** That's a long story. After the war, the art scene in Czechoslovakia was dominated by socialist realism [the official Communist Party aesthetic that forbade any style of art or literature that deviated from strict realism with marxist overtones]. Any notion of any kind of experimentation with media was looked on like a notion of the avant-garde of the '20s. Though the avant-garde of that time had been leftist, by the time I grew up, the left was already bankrupt. It was associated with the most reactionary thoughts and suppressed experimentation. I'm talking about the Czech situation.

We, as a generation growing up in a film environment—like the film school of which



Photos by Marcia Mihaluk

A scene from 'The Commission'; Vasulka (inset: 'An image is an energy system')

I was a product—were concentrating on the opposite of experimentation. We paid no attention to what's called the "medium-basis of information," or undertaking a formal investigation of a medium for its own sake. We were interested in what ideologies are interested in, which is larger mythological or narrative systems. As a group in film school, we followed the metaphorical approach. Maybe you could disguise political opposition through metaphor.

But when I came to the States in 1965, I discovered there was a whole generation of practicing film-makers called the structuralists who paid close attention to what the European avant-garde of the '20s did. But these artists extended much further the idea about the material of the medium itself: film surface, motion, elements, information within a frame. Suddenly, I came to recognize the materiality of the medium—the medium has its own truth. All this prepared me for video.

Then, in 1969, I began to experiment with video in New York. About that time it hit me that this is the medium in which I wanted to work. I was interested in this metaphysical concept—that an image is an energy system.

**Ausubel:** What was the nature of your early work with video?

**Vasulka:** The nature of our early work was non-figurative or non-representational. We generated images through electronic

systems. We produced numerous tapes that included this aspect of video—what some people call "abstract video." But that is just a transposition of one aesthetic term from abstract painting to this electronic environment.

Right from the beginning, we felt challenged by television as a perception system. We weren't interested in aesthetic results. You see, film travels at the rate of 24 frames per second, but with video you have 60 "fields" per second. Video encodes many more changes than film, and you can build devices that can work with a single field.

**Ausubel:** What was your role in the development of computer video?

**Vasulka:** In the early '70s, we happened to be with a group of people who were working with video, and they made an effort to bring video and the computer into a union. We had only one way of doing it. We built a separate small computer next to the general-purpose computer, and we made a time-link between them, in which they communicated synchronously, even that is not an innovative idea, because it's natural to these technology systems to copulate.

We defined a basic set of rules, and our images were one of the first manifestations of what is called "video art." Our contribution, really, was to define the computer and video in the context of art. Even now there is still a debate on whether there is, in fact, computer art. Sometimes, for the sake of

amazing video images are not the art-initiated but those that are mathematically or numerically initiated. Then I have to ask myself: Which one is the radical image? Not, which one is the successful image?

**Ausubel:** Some of your work appears to be looking into areas of human perception and cognition.

**Vasulka:** Yes. For instance, we found we could change the color of each video "field" and create "layers," or what we called "perceptually induced mixes." But there are other perceptual systems and cognitive interpretations. We discovered that a particular event, like computer feedback, correlates preceding and succeeding events. So when you end one image with another completely different image, you find out that your vision interprets them logically. Actually, the images are cognitively interpreted.

It's not only discovering the materiality of video or its codes that challenges us, but it is also just a pleasure to see these images and the changes in them.

**Ausubel:** You're most often called a video artist. Do you accept that term?

**Vasulka:** No. It's just a term through which you make a living. A long time ago, we didn't need that term at all. "Video artist" already indicates a set of limitations. It's basically a marketing scheme. "Video art" was coined by the galleries because they had to handle the product, but it really doesn't mean much at all.

Personally, it's not my ambition to be a video artist. I'm just very grateful that I could find some medium in which I could be a practical philosopher. The other labels I'm pragmatic enough to use because they raise money.

**Ausubel:** What do you mean by "practical philosopher"?

**Vasulka:** The whole idea of aesthetic terms like structuralism and philosophical terms like time and energy were rather abstract to me. Video is a medium that exposes you to a specific problem of time and energy. Suddenly, energy becomes a certain set of brightness and time becomes a location of that particular energy on the time raster, which is a frame in video. Suddenly, the abstract concept of light or location of light in time becomes extraordinarily practicable. Through this medium I could enter a practical philosophy of time and energy as a means of expression.

**Ausubel:** Then do you consider yourself an artist?

**Vasulka:** In a way I don't think so. In my own personal terms, it's not my ambition. In the process of experimentation, there are two results: Either it succeeds or it fails. But art must succeed; there's no "failed art." I don't want to live with the necessity of being successful, and that's what art is.

**Ausubel:** So experimentation is integral to your work?

**Vasulka:** Yes. Yet I respect art, and all the values of my life have something to do with that. If I would psychoanalyze myself, indeed, I would probably find that at the bottom I have some kind of desire to produce art. Yet consciously, I'm trying to walk the furthest circle around art.

People sometimes call my work "technology determinist," that is, no longer aesthetically driven. What I am driven by is a curiosity about the medium. I do want to find out if there are any codes or patterns that video can create that sometimes border on art, but this is definitely not a part of an aesthetic system.

**Ausubel:** How did you come to create your video opera, "The Commission"?

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# Infinite Complexity

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**Vasulka:** I wanted to work with the larger symbolic narrative systems that are integrated into general cultural archetypes, like opera. I asked myself: Is there an application of those primary video codes—which you arrive at by experimentation, investigation or just pure visual joy—that you can possibly apply to this more established genre? This opera was a rather formal exercise for me in which I took certain imaging structures from past work and transposed them into a narrative context.

Still, in the work I'm not really saying anything through thought or conscious, spoken ideas; the meaning of the opera is still communicated in the sense of the medium. I don't like thought-produced meaning; I prefer an image-produced paradox that subverts thought. Perhaps the opera will work, perhaps not. That is another question. It was done as an experiment.

**Ausubel:** Much of your work in the past has been done in the academic worlds in the East. Now that you've come to Santa Fe, do you see your work changing?

**Vasulka:** As long as I was involved in discovering or summarizing the phenomenology of electronic imaging, I was able to teach. In many ways I was excited about teaching when I was discovering those codes. But when I moved on to application, innovation ceased and my involvement with my work became more personal. This work could not be communicated with such excitement because it became doubtful and insecure. When you start working, talking or trying to impose on someone else your own creative dilemma, it's a brutal and oppressive act. I was totally absorbed in what I was doing.

In general, I don't like to work. I don't want to get involved in any job. If I can avoid a job, I will. Not being involved in a job is very natural where I come from. Here

in America there is a moral code that says a job means dignity. The idea of being lazy here is devastating. Where I come from, most of the fairy tales are about lazy people. A lot of the state of well-being is based on being extraordinarily lazy: To be able to sit without guilt and to stare into the sunset and just be heated by the sun. That's permitted. Here, of course, one gets under the spell of the rush of society. In the early years here, I submitted myself to that wonderful rush. Then I found out that it's not very interesting. So I'm trying to get away, as much as possible, from phone calls—even from getting up from bed.

**Ausubel:** Would you agree, then, with Paul La Fargue, Karl Marx's son-in-law, that people have the right to be lazy?

**Vasulka:** The whole idea about activity and morality is very much a Western thought: There's no relief for people accused of being lazy. In my eyes, they are heroes. They submit themselves to the deepest possible torture. Any activity takes you into the area of optimism again. That's why people in the West like to travel or develop all sorts of activities; they hope to prevent death, improve finances, become mentally more healthy. True, it's profitable to be active, but the opposite is much more challenging.

Coming to Santa Fe is a retirement from my duties. I found out that this isn't a community to compete in, but one to contemplate. It's a privilege to be able to contemplate your life, but it's more difficult to contemplate than simply produce.

Woody Vasulka's video opera, "The Commission," will be presented as a benefit for Tone Roads West, a four day festival of poetry and new music, at the C.G. Rein Gallery (122 W. San Francisco) at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 16. Tickets, which are \$8, can be reserved by calling 988-1878.

## TONE ROADS WEST

Santa Fe as a year-round music center is growing by the proverbial leaps and bounds. What is most interesting and encouraging about this development is that much of the activity is composed, performed, and organized by local musicians, in the teeth, as it were, of Santa Fe's often spectacular but seldom indigenous Opera and Chamber Music Festival.

Most active of the hometown types is the indefatigable Peter Garland, who at 30 is not only a composer and publisher of *Soundings*, one of the most useful and distinguished music journals in the world,

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## NEWS continued:

but also organizer of *Tone Roads West: Poetry and New Music*, taking place in Santa Fe from March 16 to 20 (see the *ARTlines* Calendar for details).

The music programs will be highlighted by the benefit world premiere of *The Commission*, a video opera by Santa Fe's Woody Vasulka. *From the Diary of an Edgewalker*, *Labyrinth*, and a world premiere to be announced, all by local composer Joseph Weber, will be performed, as will compositions by Jackson MacLow and Garland, and a multi-media performance by Charles Amirkhania and Carol Law.

Other *Tone Roads West* events include poetry readings by Mei-Mei Berrsenbrugge, John Brandi, Joy Harjo, Arthur

Sze, Carolyn Forché, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Simon Ortiz, Carol Cellucci, Harold Littlebird, Leo Romero, and others.

In an unrelated musical offering, California composer Lou Harrison will bring his puppet opera, *Richard Whittington*, to Santa Fe's Armory for the Arts on March 10 and 11. Harrison was doing puppet opera when the Muppets were only a gleam in Jim Henson's eye. Garland himself has written a puppet opera about the conquest of Mexico, which he hopes to present in 1984.

In April, fashionable composer Philip Glass will perform with an eight-member ensemble at Santa Fe's Lensic Theater on April 14.



Los Alamos Monitor  
7/83

# A five-day festival to open in Santa Fe

By WILLIAM DUNNING  
Monitor Correspondent

The voices of music and the music of voices blend this week in an unusual and ambitious undertaking sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts in the capital, blending music and poetry.

Tone Roads West is the title of this intense five-day festival that begins Wednesday and continues through Sunday. For series ticket information, you can call 988-1878. Tickets to single events are available at the door only. Except for the benefit opening event Wednesday, all performances are in St. Francis Auditorium at the Fine Arts Museum in Santa Fe.

Tone Roads West opens at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday with a premiere of a new form: video opera. It will be at the C.G. Rein Gallery, 122 West San Francisco. The work is titled "The Commission," and was produced by Woody Vasulka, the Czech-born video producer. Vasulka, who works with his wife Steina, prefers the term "experimenter" to "video artist," noting that he is not always successful. This lends a certain air of expectation to Wednesday's

premiere. The plot revolves around an incident in the lives of composer Hector Berlioz and violinist Nicolo Paganini. Telephone the gallery to reserve a seat.

Thursday and Friday's programs begin at 7 p.m. at St. Francis Auditorium. A poetry reading by Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, John Brandi, Joy Harjo and Arthur Sze, poetry coordinator for the events, begin the Thursday events. At 9:30 p.m., composer Joseph Weber will perform his new music, including a premiere. He is supposed to perform on the auditorium's McNary organ.

Friday's opening event at 7 p.m. is a free talk by poet Carolyn Forche about El Salvador. Forche is a human-rights advocate whose recent book, "The Country Between Us" is based on her time in El Salvador. At 8:15 p.m., poet Jackson MacLow and violinist Malcolm Goldstein start the new music, to be followed by Santa Fe composer and publisher Peter Garland. His music is drawn from Mexican and Native American sources, and sometimes reminds the listener of Carlos Chavez.

We may expect to hear Malcolm Goldstein in the "Matachin Dances" which Garland dedicated to him.

On Saturday, a poetry reading at 1 p.m. features Floyce Alexander, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Simon Ortiz, and Luci Tapahonso. At 3 p.m., Carolyn Forche discusses Salvadorean poet Claribel Alegria in the Museum's conference room. Then at 7 p.m., she and Jackson MacLow read some of their poetry in the auditorium. Goldstein presents music in a 9:30 p.m. concert.

On Sunday, last day of the festival, Goldstein and MacLow talk about the fusion of poetry and music in the conference room at 2 p.m. Local poets Carol Cellucci, Harold Littlebird, Leo Romero and Nathaniel Tarn read at 6 p.m. in the auditorium, followed at 8:30 p.m. by Charles Amirkhania and Carol Law with a multi-media new music work, "Hypothetical Moments."

Some of the big names in current new music, like Amirkhania and Goldstein, will be joining prominent locals like Garland and Weber for the music-half of

this event. Poets like Forche and MacLow as well as some bright names on the local scene, promise to make this a heady blend of voice and verse. It's good to see the festival idea taking hold in Santa Fe, and to see the film, music and other events spreading out in the calendar.

For a preview of some of the music, you may want to get the record, "Garland: Matachin Dances," a record by Ronald Erickson, John Tenney, violins; Peter Garland, gourd rattles, on the Cold Blue label, E6.

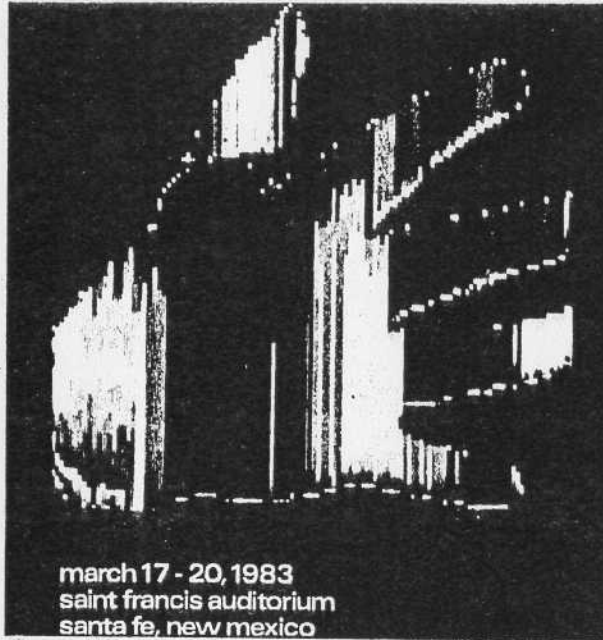
These short dances, about 18 minutes total for the suite of six dances, based on the ancient Native American Indian tradition, are a subjective sort of recreation of the traditional sound. Except for two of them, No. 4, the Dance of Death, written in memory of John Lennon, and No. 5, Corcovi, the Night Bird, they have vigorous dancing rhythm that makes them come alive in the ear.

I found myself thinking more of Carlos Chavez and Mexican Indians than the New Mexico variety, though there is a feeling of home here, too. The performance might be more sprightly,

and perhaps will be repeated someday. Garland's music deserves more exposure to the listening public. This recording was made June 9, 1981 at a San Francisco new music festival.

Cold Blue Records of Los Angeles produces a clean sound in stereo, but packages the records in a soft package that is hard to dust-proof; a plastic cover or innerjacket is a worthwhile idea. You can get copies of this record from the composer at his Soundings Press, 948 Canyon Road, or probably during the Tone Roads West festival in Santa Fe.

# POETRY AND MUSIC:



March 17 - 20, 1983  
 Saint Francis Auditorium  
 Santa Fe, New Mexico

Four days and nights of new music performance and poetry. Presenting two nationally acclaimed poets, and also draws on some of New Mexico's best poets. All together in Santa Fe, from March 17 thru 20th, 1983.

TONE ROADS WEST, brings together leaders in the fields of sound/text composition, experimental poetry and new music composition and performance. Bringing this many brilliant minds to one stage will certainly set the creative sparks flying. TONE ROADS WEST offers the audience a rare opportunity to be present at the creation, to experience the dynamics of interaction between some of America's exceptional artists, writers and composers.

Undoubtedly one of the main attractions is the reading of poetry and the speaking of Carolyn Forché on human rights in El Salvador.

Carolyn Forché's first book of poems, *Gathering the Tribes*, won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award in 1976. Subsequently, she received fellowships

from John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. As a journalist and human rights advocate, she travelled extensively in El Salvador between January, 1978 and March, 1980. She provided documentation to international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. Her second book of poems, *The Country Between Us*, was the Lamont Selection of the Academy of American Poets for 1981. It was published by Harper & Row, with a special edition by Copper Canyon Press.

Also featuring, a special opening night benefit premiere of the video-opera "The Commission" by Woody Vasulka. About a commission Hector Berlioz received to compose a work for Paganini, and which later turned out to be fraudulent. In living color, on large screen, featuring composer Robert Ashley, video artist Ernest Gusella, Cosimo Corsana, Ben Harris and Andrea Harris, with sets by sculptor Bradford Smith. Camera work by Steina Vasulka.

Internationally-acclaimed video artist Woody Vasulka, was born in Czechoslovakia, and now lives in Santa Fe with his wife and co-worker Steina. In the 1970s they moved to New York, where they founded Kitchen, one of the best-known alternative performance spaces in the United States. Both are renowned for their pioneering work in extending the technical aesthetics of video, and for their integration of video and sound into this medium.

Internationally-acclaimed video artist Woody Vasulka was born in Czechoslovakia, and now lives in Santa Fe with his wife and co-worker Steina. In the 1970s they moved to New York, where they founded Kitchen, one of the best-known alternative performance spaces in the United States. Both are renowned for their pioneering work in extending the technical aesthetics of video, and for their integration of music and sound into this medium.

For all the reasons listed above and many more, we highly recommend this unique event that promises to be one of the most important in this field. For more information contact Suzanne Jamison \*\*\* For more information contact Suzanne Jamison 988-1878 or Arthur Sze 982-8262.

NEW MEXICO ARTS DIVISION  
 113 Lincoln Avenue • Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501  
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*Some days you just can't win...*

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Series tickets are now available for "BONE ROADS WEST: POETRY AND NEW MUSIC," four days and nights of concerts, poetry readings, and lectures sponsored by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts. The events will be March 17-20 at St. Francis Auditorium and cost for the series is \$30, tickets, and available at 109 Washington Ave. Call 988-1878 to make reservations.

Internationally recognized artists in sound/text composition, experimental poetry, new music composition and performance come together to create an experience.

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