

Souping it up with rock

David Borden, Steve Drews, and Linda Fisher came down from Ithaca to give an exciting concert at the Kitchen on January 6. They call their group Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Co., and they use five Moog synthesizers. Most of the time they play the synthesizers with keyboards, using them as souped-up electric organs. The sounds can be varied more than those of an organ can, but the effect is much closer to organs than to what we usually think of as electronic music.

The concert opened with a tape, which began a conventional rendition of "Put another nickel in, in the nickelodeon. All I want is loving you and music music music." Looking at a stage full of Moog synthesizers, this was the last thing I expected to hear. But then the singer on the tape starts to repeat the word "music" over and over again, and the performers start to join in. They each play repeated melodic fragments, with one of the instruments always standing out as the main line. The fragments vary in length, and sometimes patterns of different lengths run along simultaneously, creating a complicated fabric. The patterns change frequently, and the music is always interesting. In the background the singer

not particularly original, since Terry Riley, among others, was using similar techniques several years earlier. The unique thing about them is the way they have infused these repetitive techniques with rock elements and made them more accessible. The audience was wildly enthusiastic.

SERGIO CERVETTI's music does not have the popular appeal of Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Co., but it has other

virtues. His pieces have strong personalities and distinctive sounds. Most of Cervetti's music that I have heard is strident and even nasty expressionism. Aesthetically it is related to Varese and Penderecki, although he achieves this intensity with techniques that are all his own. Now, judging from his latest work, "From the Earth," he is moving to a quieter style, more akin to

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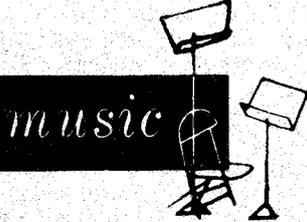
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Mother Mallard's Portable
Masterpiece Co., Sergio
Cervetti at the Kitchen
(Johnson)
Pierre Boulez's "... ex-
plosantefixe..."
by the Chamber Music
Society of Lincoln
Center (Kerner)

on the tape continues to repeat the word "music," which is also the title of the piece.

"Bells" is a shorter piece, built around a steady beat which sounds vaguely like a bell chiming. Against this, the keyboards fill in rather fluid lines, almost impressionistic in mood.

"Ceres Motion" is similar in mood for a while, but it builds to a rich rhythmic texture, with a bass line which could almost pass for rock.

In "Almost Two Years" the stabilizing element is a gentle little swaying pattern which rocks back and forth on four notes. Other notes appear and disappear against this to maintain the interest, but the main element is this unchanging little swaying pattern which becomes increasingly tranquil, almost nostalgic, as the piece goes on. It is a lovely little piece.

The concert ended with a longer work called "Easter." This relies a great deal on the sequencer, which is a device on the Moog which allows one to program rhythmic patterns so that they can be rattled off automatically. With several sequencers operating at once, the rhythms are wildly complicated. The players at the keyboards come in against the automatic sounds, sometimes competing with them quite well in terms of pure virtuosity. The music gradually opens up into a rich texture which becomes more and more joyous and rocklike. By the end it sounds like an electronic reincarnation of Jimi Hendrix.

Borden and Drews take credit for the composing, but Fisher turns in some of the best solos. It is a well balanced group, and they work together well. Their music is