

Music student refutes 'King Lear' review

To the Editor:

D. B. Axelrod's review of Eric Jensen's music for King Lear (see Tuesday's issue of The Daily Iowan) reveals more about the writer's ignorance than about the subject he purports to discuss. His use of peculiarly inappropriate and derisive metaphors, and his insistence on referring to the music as "sound effects," indicate a hostile predisposition and a lack of perception which seriously qualify the value of his critical judgment. The whole tenor of his article is so unreasonable that a complete reappraisal of the music seems in order.

Having worked as a musician in several professional theaters, and having been disappointed with the weak and unimaginative music used in many productions, I found Eric Jensen's music unusually original, tasteful and dramatically appropriate. Although the electronic and modified natural sounds may have created a difficulty for those theatergoers unfamiliar with this relatively new medium, for myself and many others the music intensified and quickened the pace of the drama, helping to sustain audience involvement over the three-hour length of the play.

The use of leit-motives — distinctive sound textures associated with specific characters and dramatic situations — added a unifying element to the drama. The music accompanying Regan's first speech was rather sweet and feminine, yet contained sinister elements which became more pronounced as her true nature unfolded later on. Particularly effective was the music in scenes depicting Lear's madness, which helped transport the drama into a world of insane fantasy. The over-

ture, with its slowly changing tone colors, well-chosen textures, and successful pacing, was a fine piece of music in its own right. Of special interest was Jensen's use of stereo. At the outset, the overture seemed to envelope the entire theater; but its final sounds, coming from somewhere behind the set, drew one's thoughts to the approaching stage action. During the battle scene in the final act, violent sounds were catapulted across the auditorium, aurally conveying the sense of the unseen conflict.

The use of the tape medium in the theater offers great possibilities, and should become common as more composers acquire the necessary techniques. Commendations are due to director Cosmo Catalano for his initiative in employing this new medium and to Eric Jensen, whose music contributed much to an already splendid production.

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