

# Life and works of Lewis remembered at UI concert

By John Voland  
Staff Writer

Presenting a retrospective of a man's life within the confines of a single afternoon (or day, or week) is impossible, even if the life was sadly cut short, as Peter Tod Lewis' was. It spills, overfull, into the surrounding lives, times, thoughts.

That said, the memorial concert dedicated to Lewis Saturday afternoon at Clapp Hall gave the audience a glimpse of several different facets of Lewis' creative output and left a token of his presence. Early (the "Sweets for Piano" from 1965), late ("Bricolage" from 1979), and still later ("Gestes III: Douceurs" from 1980) works were all represented; the composite portrait was of a genial, curious man whose music poked under corners and looked at the sky and then told, in a dense and humorous tongue, what it had seen there.

LEWIS' MUSIC IS thoroughly contemporary: Electronic media (tapes, synthesizers) are employed to fill out and define acoustic/traditional elements. Sometimes difficult, often implicit, this music requires concentration and the willingness to explore. Work went into the creation of it, and work must go into the comprehension of it. This is the voice of modern artistic thought: besieged, splintered, esoteric and wonderful.

Our loss, and the loss of the musical world, is sharp and great: Peter Tod Lewis was a very talented man.

His "Bricolage," for a battery of percussion and tape, opened the program. Michael Geary came on stage, took a trapezoidal piece of wood in his hands, and beat out soft rain-sounds in varying intensities and rhythms ("Rain"); moving to "traditional" percussion, he beat out a multifarious sound composed of bells, xylophone, cymbals and wood blocks ("Chorale").

A march of sorts, turned in against its own rhythm, was defined by bass drum, snare and high-hat, then exploded ("Rhythmus"). Vibes, taped strings and light splashes of bells painted a solitary

thoughtfulness that was in turn chuckled over and forgotten ("Harmonie," "Melodie"). Geary, as in his appearances with the Center for New Music, was phenomenal.

Donald Martin Jenni took over on piano for the "Sweets," which emerged, in spite of its episodic plan (ten separate "sweets"), as a whole thought, just as he had promised in his notes on the set ("this is a single and singular composition").

IF THE WORK was less convincing than what came before and after, it may be due to its fairly early date and its exploitation of the piano's sound; it seemed Lewis was after something the piano could not provide. But Jenni gave it his considerable all, and the images — jazzy, violent and moody by turns — came across very clearly.

"Gestes III" was an intimate, ballad-like duet between Lewis (singing and playing piano) and his synthesizer; a story, maybe, of what man is and what he has made. This brief work, more than any other, gave a picture of Lewis the man, singing to himself and listening, fascinated, at the results.

Lewis' Second String Quartet, titled "Signs and Circuits," was the afternoon's most powerful experience, alternating as it did between tape-augmented violence and restrained, ruminative late Romanticism à la Shostakovich. A dichotomy was set up between anything-goes Modernism (wide, nauseous vibratos, playing on the bridges, glissandos, tapping and hitting the instruments, and so on) — what I took to be the "signs" of things contemporary — and the quiet reflections — the "circuits" — in that tradition seemed to be flowing through these passages.

Lewis remarked in his notes for the piece that "the work (should) be allowed to unfold, to grow, to surprise me and you. There is great joy in this." The Stradivari Quartet obviously agreed; their performance was committed, gutsy, kaleidoscopic, and, of course, joyous.

Which adjective could, after the concert and walking home in the springlike afternoon, could describe my own encounter with the muse of Peter Tod Lewis. May his memory live on.