

Looking for sparks of spontaneity, musician rides with the currents

By BETH GAUPER
Features Editor

Segovia began his musical career on the piano as a child, biographers note, and Mozart began composing and playing at the tender age of 5. If a biography is ever done of Dave Olive, his infantile infatuation with his rattle would begin the narrative.

Since his formative years of shaking his rattle and banging his Kool-aid glass, Olive's romance with sound has involved him in every kind of music, from trumpeting to disc-spinning to jazz programming to electronic music to complicated multi-media works. Somehow, he's always been involved with the public performance of music, or sound—he argues that the two are synonymous.

And, once again, the time has come for him to disgorge his work to the world. Monday night he gave a retrospective of his last two years' work, with help from saxophonist Bob Thompson, trumpeter Ed Sarath, and mbira player Scott Hayward; tonight he and his friends will perform a concert of "music of expansion" at 8 in the Old Brick sanctuary.

"When enough people come by and hear my stuff and say, 'Hey, that's neat,' then I'll do a show," Olive said. This time there was another reason for his back-to-back shows — on Wednesday he'll leave for California with a marine biologist friend to listen to and record the sounds of whales, and he wanted to raise travel expenses. The expenses have since been met, he added, and the funds have gone towards wine for the audience.

"You get to the point where immediate gratification is not really necessary," he said. "I don't have to play my tapes every day and week and have people say, 'Oh, that's wonderful.'" But every once in a while, he added, he feels the need to perform.

"It's kind of like puking. You take in all this information throughout the world. And you take it in and store all this stuff. Most people are content to use their brains; I'm working on storing through different



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Making structure synch with improvisation: Dave Olive, tinkering with a mixer and synthesizer.

mechanisms." Olive's particular mechanism is tape, with which he captures sound. And once it's there, he likes to tinker with it.

"I'll go and gather a bunch of sounds that are neat. I'll try to keep the same feeling when I'm working on a piece," he said. "All sounds are objects on magnetic tape. Tape makes sound an object that can be used. When it's an object, you can process it into something different; not necessarily better, just different."

His music of expansion is based on improvisation. "It's music of expansion," Olive explained, "a, because it's a neat phrase; and b, because that's what it is. We hear what someone else plays; we play beyond what you've ever played. We try to go beyond the 'tricks,' 'licks' and 'riffs' to expand beyond."

"When you play tunes," he said, "you try to develop it to perfection. You play it so many times it becomes unconscious. We're trying to spontaneously develop structures as well as solos. We have to start somewhere, but we don't know where it's going to end; we all solo together until we get to a point when all five of us decide on the spur of the moment that the song is going to end."

Another turning point in Olive's biography, perhaps, would be his stint at a New Orleans radio station in 1972-'73. There he was dubbed "The Plumber," because, he said, "I would plumb people's heads; every night I would do some weird audio trick." During the tedious hours of his 2-5 a.m. stint, he began mixing albums and making his own sound effects, such as throwing the sounds of marching infantry into the middle of a song. At that time of the night, why not — "Anyone who was awake at that time of day was already that way anyway," he said. His eventual move to prime time, — 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. — disappointed him.

When he returned to Iowa City, he served a year on CUE, the now-defunct Commission for University Entertainment. In the spring of the same year, his proposal for CAP, the Commission for Alternative Programming, was approved. His year-long stint on CAP coincided with his year as programming assistant at the Union, ending with his graduation with a B.G.S. in May 1976.

Olive's presence on the Iowa City new music scene has

continued, always with an emphasis on exploration. He co-founded an "art cooperative for media exploration" called the American Magic Media Co. during the summer of 1976. Other video shows and productions followed. Now, in addition to free-lance video work, he finds himself teaching. His second artist-in-residency at the Willowwind School is approaching; he maintains a consultancy at United Action for Youth after building and outfitting a studio for them. He advised the City Council when it was entertaining proposals from cable television companies ("I put a lot of information in a lot of ears"), resulting in what he thinks will be "one of the better public access systems in the country."

Always the emphasis is on newness and exploration; the search for a spark of spontaneity. Perhaps the term "recital" for tonight's performance of tapes and live music is a misnomer; a "grope" might be more appropriate. The material will be new not only to the audience but to the performers: According to Olive, "None of us have ever heard any of the stuff before, either."

DOONESBURY

by Garry Trudeau