

# Shock of the new fails to frighten UI's Gaburo

By John Voland  
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Today's technological world — an increasingly segmented, discontinuous place where diversity in one's career is about as plausible as winning the Irish sweepstakes — doesn't seem a welcome place for creative souls, unless they work in swank advertising offices, mixing new alchemies of insinuation, or in fluorescent microchip hatcheries, gesturing like Prospero over a computer terminal.

But there remain some determined people who insist on doing things their own way and in their own time, and UI School of Music professor Kenneth Gaburo is such a one. He has labored in the name of creation (whether it be installation art, musique concrete or multimedia pieces) for years now and shows no sign of giving up the good fight — the one for personal expression.

Gaburo does several things well and wants to keep it that way. "I'm involved in everything; I'm sort of all over the place. I'm a composer, but a composer in the light of video work, film work, ensembles, performance, and so on," he said. "I'm interested in making things, putting things together."

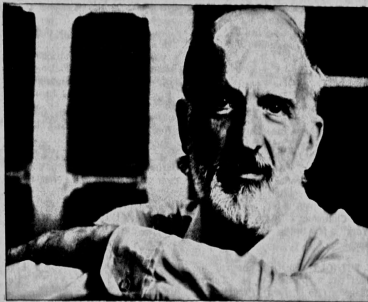
**HE WANTS TO** assemble a group here in Iowa City to do the same sort of things ("but differently," he cautioned) that a group he was involved with in San Diego did, such as

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giving performances of Samuel Beckett's "Play," wherein three performers face the audience undeviatingly and speak continually and rapidly in response to lighting cues that serve as a "Grand Inquisitor."

"One of Beckett's metaphors is the cycle, the fact that we're always caught up in our own redundancies. The rapid, circular speech reinforces that. And Beckett said that this could on as long ... well, as long as the audience can tolerate it," he said.

"The first time one hears it, because of the speed, and the shifts and so on, the language is essentially unintelligible ... it emerges as sound. Over-



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## UI School of Music professor Kenneth Gaburo

tones, harmonics, all that. The more you hear it, though, the more the ideas get into you. It starts getting three-dimensional, insinuating, seductive."

These two concerns — audience participation and insinuation — are central to Gaburo's art. Interaction, the processing of information by the audience and active reaction are all essential for his work to function.

**THE BECKETT** piece serves as a

audience is anything that throws them a little off base, to get them to say, 'Hey, this is not just business as usual here.' I want it to be so compelling that they just can't say 'Aagh' and walk away from it."

But he wants very much to avoid the didacticism and almost fascistic quality of many multimedia or artistipolitical efforts he has seen. "I care an awful lot (about the audience) — I don't want to beat them over the head — and I know there's a limit to what they can take. But they have to do work; they have to recognize that effort is required of them."

And the younger generation — those who fill halls to hear Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and John Cage — do recognize this (most of the time). In fact, this is one of the problems Gaburo has faced — sophistication of his audience to the point of rendering the work meaningless in the face of so many associations.

**THE RESPONSE** to this blase attitude is seduction with substance, so far as Gaburo is concerned. The "hammer-to-head school" of shock-art is dead, he asserts. "In the same sense that slick advertising has seduced us in terms of its slickness, its surface appeal, so confrontational art, like Chris Burton's stuff of a decade ago, is being questioned on the basis of its temporariness. Now we see the beginning of people wanting to take this stuff seriously, of searching for content, for what's inside of this sort of thing."

It may seem odd for a composer whose work includes much electronic material (and who is the electronic music professor at the School of Music) to knock the technology that feeds him, but Gaburo is concerned about the very technological seductiveness that such instruction provides.

"It has gotten to the point," he said, "where the feeling is the artist has to conform to the technology rather than the other way around. The art that results becomes an apology. You have to work at playing a synthesizer the same way you have to work at the piano, as an instrument, not as a toy."

**GABURO ENJOYS** his work at the UI and the environs of the school as well. He pointed to the school's history of "happenings" in the late 1960s and said the feeling still lingers. "Though the problems of running a university are highlighted here because of the relative isolation, they are also more easily solved. The sophistication is here, but it's against a background of closeness to the earth, so it stands out. There's a lot more opportunity to do work here than in California because of the closeness of the situation and the lack of bullshit found in the big-city artistic community.

"People work hard here and don't think too much about it. I think that's spectacular, and it's something I want to instill. It feels good here — I want to stick around and provoke a few people to bring their talents to the world after having grown here."