

# Fluting, computing and tooting

■ UI senior John Ritz has taught a computer to "listen" to and accompany a flute.

By Nicole Schuppert

The Daily Iowan

When UI senior John Ritz began his musical career by taking up cello lessons in fourth grade, he never thought he would be programming computers to "listen" to and play music by the age of 21.

Ritz, who is majoring in music and media production, has composed a piece called "Slope-Cluster-Spiral." The song is a simultaneous performance of a flute and a computer that he programmed to "listen."

This is the first time anything of this nature has ever been done at the UI, said Lawrence Fritts, the director of the UI electronic music studios. Ritz is a research assistant for Fritts.

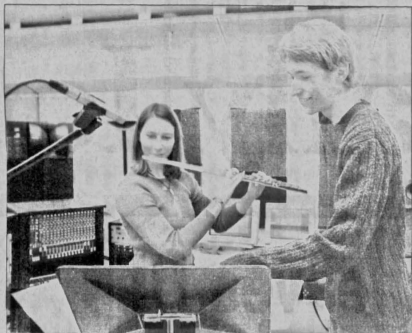
"I hope this is something that catches on in the future, and more performers can move away from the classic accompanist," Ritz said.

Ritz said his piece is unusual because the performer is free to play around with the rhythm and pitch of his music.

"The piece will never be performed exactly the same twice," he said.

A black box called the Kyma System is hooked up to the computer. When the performer plays, the sound goes into the box, and the computer modifies the sound depending on how the students have programmed the computer.

As an audio engineer at the studio, Ritz records, mixes, and produces music. He also helps with recording sessions at the Voxman Music Building. Another responsibility Ritz has is to install and test new hardware and software at the studio and give demonstrations to



Denise Powell/The Daily Iowan

UI senior music and media production major John Ritz rehearses with UI graduate student Tamara Chadima for an upcoming concert, scheduled to be held in Clapp Recital Hall on Jan. 30 at 8 p.m.

classes on the new equipment.

Ritz is currently working on a five-year project to study the behavior of the natural sounds of musical instruments in an echo-free room. The data from the research will allow new electronic sounds to be created.

The piece Ritz composed contains three sections: a fast section at the beginning, a slow middle section, and an ending that repeats the first section, Fritts said. The piece is approximately six minutes long, he said.

"The sound of the computer complements and blends with the flute," Fritts said.

Flutist Tamara Chadima, a UI graduate student, said she would take advantage of the opportunity again if Ritz composes another piece.

"It's neat to work right along with the composer," she said. "We've added things together, and I can always ask him how he wants me to interact with the computer."

Upon his graduation from the UI, which he anticipates to be in May of 2001, Ritz plans to work as an audio engineer in a recording studio. He also plans to continue composing music on the side.

"This is his love and what he wants to do with his life," Fritts said. "I'm glad he has the experience to use the new cutting-edge technology we have here."

Ritz's piece will be performed in Clapp Recital Hall on Jan. 30 at 8 p.m., along with other UI students' work. The performances are free and open to the public.

DI reporter Nicole Schuppert can be reached at: nicole-schuppert@uiowa.edu