

'Manestar' the mainstay of concert

By John Voland
Staff Writer

It's doubly unfortunate when part of a concert is cancelled due to illness (not counting frailty of the "artistic differences" or "insurmountable conflicts" varieties); not only does the listener miss out on the performance, but the balance of the program is usually upset.

And it's especially unfortunate when there's a premiere at stake, as happened Saturday evening at the Center for New Music's concert at Clapp Hall. UI professor Richard Hervig's "Five Romantic Songs," which was to be performed for the first time, had to be cancelled due to the illness of soprano Kathryn Focht. Both Focht and Hervig have done fine things recently and both piece and performance were sorely missed.

What resulted was a truncated affair that was overbalanced toward an uninvolved set of solo timpani pieces by Elliot Carter and took spontaneity away from the fine work by the late

Music

director of the School of Music's Electronic Studio, Peter Tod Lewis. It also bracketed (muffled?) an intriguing, if somewhat static, work by Paul Paccione, a School of Music graduate student.

THE CARTER pieces, split off into two "suites" of four, gave the performer, Michael Geary, a true workout — I have never seen a man zip around four timpani quite so quickly and so well — but the inherent lack of color that plagues most percussive instruments when played solo took its toll here.

Carter is a gifted composer — arguably the greatest of his generation — and his treatment of cross- and polyrhythms was fascinating... but only for the first fifteen minutes or so.

In between the two "suites" was the first performance of Paccione's "Forms in Change," a work for eleven

instrumentalists and soprano that was written earlier this year. In the program notes, the composer speaks of the "forms" in the title as being "sustained chords which undergo various changes in orchestration or 'color'."

The "forms" are certainly present — continually so. The harmonic change from advent to finish is slight: a seventh here, a tonic dropped there. Promised "color" changes, while apparent, were wispy, intangible; one had the sense of a large musical glacier slowly melting.

IN FACT, the static quality of the piece, drawing out as it does the subtle variations in pitch and mood, rather defeated its implied content: The forms did not change so much as they evolved. Semantics, perhaps — but a time-frame that was sensible would have helped the appreciation immensely.

Peter Tod Lewis' "Manestar," for tape and seven players, was a fascinating marriage of live and

Memorex: The junctions of hissing, buzzing, semi-vocal tape effects and the alternately calm and violent instrumental contribution were seamless. This is one of the first occasions on which I have felt tape and musicians were meant to coalesce in one performance, not to upstage each other.

Contemporary music lost a great advocate when Lewis died in California three weeks ago. I had not heard his work previously (though his reputation within the School of Music and elsewhere was very high), and I am sorry: Here was a dedicated and gifted composer. There will be a memorial concert of his work on February 13th in Clapp Hall at 3 p.m.

If you enjoy really chewing on music — mentally, of course — then by all means attend: Judging by this excellent work, Lewis was one of a handful for whom the contemporary musical scene was one of rich opportunity, not the atonal, anti-expressionist desert it sometimes seems.