

Schick sharpens musical thought

By John Loeschen

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THE EVENING WITH percussionist Steven Schick at Clapp Recital Hall Saturday night was kind of like a blind date: totally different, a little contrived, but infinitely more thought-provoking than a date with the steady.

Everyone ought to try something different once in a while, and Schick's virtuoso performance of contemporary percussive music, sponsored by the Center for New Music and the UI Foundation, certainly provided the opportunity.

In "Parsons' Piece," written by William Hibbard, director of the UI Center For New Music, Schick explored the parameters of percussive music through the use of such "non-pitch" instruments as gongs, cowbells and bass drums, blending them to suggest a loose, free-flowing, melodic line. Through the use of multiple mallets, Schick created diverse contrapuntal effects that bounced around within a musical framework as broad as the gong rack itself.

Although clearly more integrated than "Parsons' Piece," Iannis Xenakis' "Psappha" followed a similar musical structure. This time, however, the melodic line became a series of "question and answer" passages between two sets of differently pitched woodblocks. Clearly the most musical piece of the evening, "Psappha" contained a definite melodic line with discernible variations. Although Xenakis' work was probably not as "contemporary" as the other works, it was certainly the least taxing for the audience.

SCHICK CHANGED the atmosphere as he moved

into "Schickstuck," a quiet, emotional piece performed on the vibraphone. Written by Hibbard expressly for Schick, "Schickstuck" allowed the Center for New Music's former resident artist to display his tremendous technical ability and conscientious use of dynamics and tempo. "Schickstuck's" long melodic lines, spanning the four octaves of the vibraphone, were interlaced with arpeggios moving in unison, thus giving the piece a powerful, ethereal quality.

But as soon as the sounds of the vibraphone began to fade, Schick brought the audience down from the heavens and into the very real world of "Antiphony VIII: (Revolution)." Written by Kenneth Gaburo, director of the UI Electronic Music Studios, "Antiphony VIII" combined performance with pre-recorded tape, creating a very pointed statement about nuclear proliferation and the increasing expendability of the human race.

ALTHOUGH I HAVE no quarrel with the statement made by "Antiphony VIII," the piece's amateurish theatrics unfortunately detracted from its message. The tape's military drum rolls, tubular bells, spooky synthesizer noises and panic-stricken voices saying, "I just won't know what to do if somebody decides to push the button," were a little heavy-handed.

The one thing "Antiphony VIII" did do, however, (along with all the other pieces) was to give the audience a taste of contemporary percussive music from a different point of view. And who ever said a blind date was perfect anyway? Schick's performance was new, and it was different. It may not have been like going out with one's usual date, but it wasn't like kissing one's sister, either.