

# Electronic composers need not be engineers

To say that all composers of electronic music must have training in electrical engineering would be like requiring all drivers to know the intricacies of a car's engine, said Peter Lewis, assistant professor of music and director of the Electronic Music Studio, in a recent interview.

"As long as you know how to produce the sounds, it is not absolutely necessary to know why they come out that way," Lewis added.

Began in the early 1950s, electronic music composition involves the use of electronically generated sounds which are then changed in various ways. Basic to this kind of music is the tape recorder. Sounds are recorded on the tape, which is then manipulated to produce different effects by changing the tape speed, editing, playing the tape both forward and backward and splicing the tape so that parts are played in a new order.

Lewis, whose instrumental and electronic work "Manestar" was premiered in a recent Center for New Music concert, began composing electronic works five years ago when he had access to electronic studios while teaching.

He came to the University in September from Southern Illinois University in

Edwardsville. He was composer-in-residence there and held a similar position with the Metropolitan Education Center in the Arts, which served public schools in the St. Louis, Mo., area. Previous to that he taught at the Philadelphia Musical Academy in Pennsylvania.

Electronic reproduction has given the composer a situation where virtually all sounds are possible, Lewis said, even "machine-music," which is probably characteristic of the equipment. (He added, parenthetically, that the grinding sounds of a truck heard through his open window was not what he meant by "machine-music.")

Although manufactured by machines, electronic music need not have a machine-like-sound, he continued. He moved to the organ-like keyboard attached to a seven-foot-high box of plugs, lights and dials, inserted cords as a switchboard operator would and played a normal-sounding, stereophonic scale. By inserting the cords in different plugs, he changed the keyboard so that the same note sounded on every key, but with increasing volume as he struck keys further up the keyboard.

As Lewis "tinkered" with the elec-

tronic equipment, he turned around and said, "It's really like playing around with a grand sound-producing toy."

Sounds for his electronic works are sometimes achieved through a trial-and-error method and then treated as regular compositional material. He further explained that every studio has its own characteristics and limitations. The University studio, because of its smaller size, tends to produce compositions of a chamber-music type instead of a symphonic size, he said.

Composers of electronic music naturally consider their medium very much a part of the total field of music, although some performers of conventional music still do not agree, Lewis said.

Because they are not involved in presenting the music to the audience, some performers object to electronic music, saying it lacks the human element.

In partial agreement, Lewis said, "It's not too interesting to stare at a blank stage while a tape is playing.

"Consequently more and more pieces are being produced which include live performers. The coordination of these elements presents difficult musical problems, of course, but, well, we have so much polarization and segregation in so-

ciety already, why should we increase it?"

Several of the instruments in the studio were originally used as sound-testers for electronic equipment. Lewis said that manufacturers are consulting more and more with composers to improve today's electronic music machinery.

Besides directing the studio and working on his own compositions, Lewis teaches several classes. His students learn the function of the equipment, practice the effects and do their own composing. Electronic pieces are often included in University Composers Symposiums, held twice each year to premiere new works by University students.

Randy Newman, 12 SONGS (Reprise RS 8373). Something sinister and funny going on here, like a drunken cop with a Hamlet complex. The reviewer takes recourse to the cover: a rocking chair, a television, a suburban back yard with ivy leaves, flowers and the neighbor's windows peeking over the high fence. Where is R. Newman? Hiding.

He plays piano like the kid in the back of the bar, in Nome Alaska, circa 1911, cigarette dangling from his lip, head