

# Grasp the Weapon of Culture! Radical Avant-Gardes and the *Los Angeles Free Press*

ANDRE MOUNT

**I**n the 17 June 1966 issue of the *Los Angeles Free Press*, members of a group called the Los Angeles Hippodrome advertised an upcoming event—an “Homage to Arnold Schoenberg [...] One of a Series of Primarily Avant-Garde Concerts” (fig. 1). The advertisement seems to suggest nothing out of the ordinary: a recital of the composer’s complete piano works along with a slideshow of his visual art and the playing of a recorded lecture. The facing page, however, paints a very different picture (fig. 2). There the *Free Press* reproduced a series of manifestos written by the event organizers. One of them is prefaced by the assertion that “the necessity of art is to oppose illusion: to bring all possible forces to bear on reality and the things implied by it” (fig. 3). The manifesto itself is a cartoon of a dog-like creature brandishing a knife poised to cut off the head of a snake; below this the author has written, “Grasp the weapon of culture!” With their absurdist humor and heady, abstract proselytizing, these statements stand in marked contrast to the refined poise of the music of the Second Viennese School.

We may begin to explain this incongruity by considering the historical context because the mission of Joseph Byrd and Michael Agnello, founding members of the Los Angeles Hippodrome, was intentionally disruptive.<sup>1</sup> Like Peter Bürger’s “historical avant-garde,” many of this

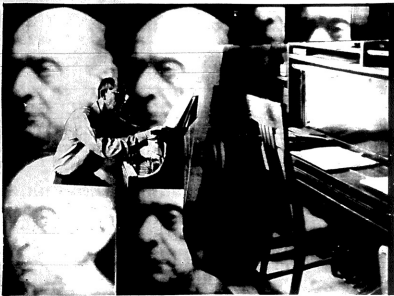
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<sup>1</sup> Of the activities discussed below, only a few were explicitly identified as being produced by the Los Angeles Hippodrome. The benefits of using a common name, however, outweigh the risks of mislabeling, particularly since so many of the participants were the same from one event to the next.

FIGURE 1. "Homage to Arnold Schoenberg" advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 24 (17 June 1966): 9

THE LOS ANGELES HIPPODROME PRESENTS

# HOMAGE TO ARNOLD SCHOENBERG



Friday, June 24, 1966  
**Aerospace Hall**  
**7660 Beverly Blvd** 8:15pm

LEONÁRD STEIN PERFORMS THE COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC  
Phantasy, Op. 47 (violinist, Lillian Akersberg), Songs, Op. 2 (soprano, Brenda Ferenczi).

SLIDES OF SCHOENBERG'S PAINTINGS

RECORDING OF A SCHOENBERG LECTURE

One of a Series of Primarily Avant-Garde Concerts  
(Produced, Directed and Co-ordinated by Michael Agnello and Joseph Byrd)  
**Sponsored by The Los Angeles Free Press**

group's activities were designed to criticize and undermine the ideology and reputation of earlier contemporary-music series.<sup>2</sup> Borrowing a term from their New-Left radical contemporaries and Los Angeles co-inhabitants, the members of the Hippodrome referred to the earlier groups collectively as "the Establishment."<sup>3</sup> They were repulsed when these groups retreated from an unreceptive public to focus on a select, elite audience, a move that in their eyes diminished the potential for social impact.

Chief among the offending predecessors was the Monday Evening Concert series. Founded as the Evenings on the Roof in 1939 by a young civil servant and part-time music critic named Peter Yates, the Monday

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Theory and History of Literature 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Bürger's use of the qualifier "historical" is intended to distinguish his primary subject—European avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century—from subsequent movements showing similar inclinations. Although the Los Angeles Hippodrome belongs to the latter group, the same kind of historical progression may be observed here.

<sup>3</sup> See for example this passage from an article written by a core member of the Los Angeles Hippodrome: "Karlheinz Stockhausen [...] is the only musical experimentalist who is tolerated by the American musical Establishment. As such [...] he has come up for close scrutiny by younger experimentalists. There are dark rumors that he is really a company spy." Joseph Byrd, "Composer Karlheinz Stockhausen: A Pluralist Esthetic Interest," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 49 (9 December 1966): 5.

FIGURE 2. Manifestos of the Los Angeles Hippodrome, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 24 (17 June 1966): 8

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JUNE 17, 1966

LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS

## THE LOS ANGELES HIPPODROME

An ongoing series of primarily avant-garde concerts and events sponsored by the L. A. Free Press, directed and coordinated by Michael Agnello and Joseph Byrd.

# MANIFESTOS

Art is dead. Let us bury it along next to god, and in doing so, let us harken back to a more fundamental state of consciousness where the only worthy successor of art's culture is the only worthy successor of god is the creative spirit of man.

A funeral if you wish, but a joyous funeral, reminiscent of the rites of certain pagan cultures. Only ours will be a circus, a HIPPODROME, where both the performers and the spectators can lose a part of themselves in exchange for their finding a more essential part that lives in the 20th century, 1966, in America, Los Angeles --- NOW.

We will use the materials of life's immediate culture, it's too late to complain about their appropriateness since the more we complain, the more we find ourselves intimately involved with them. Now is the time to stop using the whistles and whistles, the thuds and thuds of antiquated cultures that refuse to be used. Tear off the top part of this essay and put it in a cereal bowl, add sugar and milk and let sit for nine days, then place the contents into a bowl containing warm chicken broth and let sit for three days, then add beer juice and let sit for five more days, then try to obtain a recording of "Cockle Home" by the Schoenberg. Play it at 78 speed as you lay the contents of the bowl out on a piece of yellow paper (9" by 11"), reading aloud whatever words, fragments or individual letters you can decipher with the conclusion of the record; you may consider the piece finished.

Let us stop putting down Blue Chip stores, Norm's Restaurant (open all night, serving an incredible breakfast for 49 cents), Mark C. Bloom ("How Whooost! Don't let a blowout ruin your vacation"), Newberry's ("Crash Days! Safe, Safeway Market ("Many happy BONUS BINGO winners!"), Brand Motor's (Romantic Romance Shocks), "Put a tiger in your tank," The Body Shop (featuring Wee Wee Dorn, Sammy Yori), Romie Roagins (Buffy Brown and other Area novus strippers), Monday Evening Concepts (who opened its 1965 season with the advertised appearance of Carlos Chavez and Clare Bouch Luce), Sav-on Drug Store's self service, which has long been threatening to de-throne Thrifty's Cut-Rate (serving them right for what they did to Owl Facial Drug Store).

The cry should now be, "Remember what happened to Jim Clinton's" --- and we shall not forget our artist forebears, men such as Arnold Schoenberg, Charles Ives, Tristan Tzara, Walt Whitman, Thomas Jefferson, Karl Marx, Abraham Lincoln and Herbert Read's symbol for the Democratic Maces, the "five-seaters." Men whose glorious beacons have transfigured you and me.

Michael Agnello, June 12, 1966

Art stinks, art stinks, art stinks!  
Art is dull of craft, it hasn't tasted enough. It doesn't change people's lives.  
What people need they seek out, and use, and value. Most people don't seek out and use and value contemporary art.

What happens to people when they see a painting or sculpture, or listen to a concert, or watch a movie, or witness a happening? Does this experience change the way they see, think, act?  
The worst enemy of art is artists. They are unable, unwilling, or afraid to do what has to be done. Sensitivity, spontaneity, creativity and hard work are the way they see, think, act.

What is meaningful, important, an essential part of everyone's living experience. Art is a fact of life -- thinking and feeling objectified.

What people live with, think about, feel, see, touch, taste, smell, hear, is the essential part of their living experience. The effective thinking and feeling of our era is objectified in the arts of TV, radio, and magazines; the excitements of the entertainment and fashion worlds; the products and services of factories and shops.

Art and artists must function in the world as it is! Artists must use the same thinking processes and methods as the public relations men, entertainers, administrators, and scientists. Artists must ethically use effectively all these tools, as well as their own capabilities and intuition.

Neer Zimmerman, June 14, 1966

PREFACE:  
THE NECESSITY OF ART IS TO  
OPPOSE ILLUSION:  
TO BRING ALL POSSIBLE  
FORCES TO BEAR ON  
REALITY AND THE  
THINGS IMPLIED  
BY IT.

## MANIFESTO:



GRASP THE WEAPON OF CULTURE!

Joseph Byrd, June 1966

Concerts are usually too political. When I found old Jim he set me straight. The courts do the churning; buses, murderers, traffic cops, militants have all been fattened. Aghos well known for drinking, down in West LA, makes all the disks line up (according to the watch-commander), smile, jaws open, and consume his triple-breasted tuxedo. A year later was appointed to a higher court. Concerts are rarely performed without a maximum of boredom that attacks, then seeps into the recesses of uneasiness. Old Jim, and he is right --- forget about being polite and leave. As the pub pole expands, the opportunities for concerts in the area from Normandie west reduce to inhibition, longevity, smell. Any-way, less make more sense.

Eric Orr

## SCHOENBERG'S LABORATORY

PETER YATES

Arnold Schoenberg was proof of his ability to compose and complete a large musical work at great speed. "Whether simple and beautiful melodies, rhythmic turns, interesting harmony, sophisticated form, complicated counterpoint—the real composer writes them with the ease with which one writes a letter. . . . I personally believe," he continued, "to those who generally write very fast, whether it's cerebral counterpoint or 'spontaneous' melody."

Speed in itself is not the criterion. There are well-composed and badly written letters. In the article from which I have quoted, "Heart and Brain in Music," Schoenberg was refuting the various accusations flung at him that his work was entirely cerebral, or based on mathematics, or developed by cold calculation from a row of notes—or, on the contrary, that it was emotionally meaningless.

Schoenberg declared that he practiced composition every day. He believed that the composer's art does not originate from or in the technical resources of his technique is simply a device for getting the work done as he wants it. When the hidden drive of his aesthetic conscience appears to violate the stylistic formalities to which he is accustomed, a composer should trust himself to discover the new stylistic means his art requires. He may explain afterwards what he did and how and why, but any justification in his technical devices should follow and not precede his use of them.

The reversal of this procedure is a fault of serial composition, who find in the technique itself the justification of any means the technique brings forth. Schoenberg persistently refuted this malpractice.

Schoenberg's method of composition was not "experimental" so much as "exploratory." He commenced writing a new work by extending his daily practice of composition. He did not "have something to say" and put that into music. The composition grew, like a personal letter—not a business letter, which is written to a formula—by a merging of ideas and means. The idea was not necessarily a "subject." It might be no more than an urgency, a feeling of command to write. The idea and its technical requirements grew together. All of us have this experience and think it no miracle, when we write a letter to a friend. If we write well, the aesthetic consistency or content of the letter determines its exact form; we know how to begin and where to end.

With Schoenberg, the incentive was often a poem, which he composed as a song. The sense of the words would carry him forward in search of the best means.

He would explore the great variety of traditional devices, and at the point where none of these proved serviceable he would go beyond them. He did not go experimentally outside them; this experimental method was more natural to Schoenberg's American contemporaries (see, for example, Varese and Cowell), who did not share his reverence for tradition. Schoenberg's most unusual devices grew out of the Germanic tradition which he cherished; they do not violate that tradition but extend it.

Schoenberg's laboratory was the writing desk; his music must not begin, like Stravinsky's, with the feeling of intervals at the keyboard. But he adhered to the system of twelve-note equal temperament, believing firmly that this was the natural language of the composer. He was fully aware that this language had come into existence only after the end of the 19th century, succeeding at that time the 200-year reign of 12-note inequality. He was fully aware of its substantially distinct harmony. He was fully aware of the possibilities of electronic sound, and that the natural language of the technical resources might again change.

At the setting of words with music led Schoenberg to explore new musical ground, so the writing of small piano pieces became his means of consolidating these newly-explored areas in more abstract formal relationships. The method did not cease to be exploratory; having found a technical device which seemed promising, he left it. He left it to his expressive relationship with words, he would be the new idea where it led him. Only one of the three piano pieces of his Opus 11 seemed to deny the authority of its key.

One should keep in mind that Schoenberg's medium, even without the authority of a key, was fundamentally what came to be called "atonal"; that is, it diverged so far from the basic tonality of tonal music that the authority of the key was more formal than real. By the time that Schoenberg had fully recognized the implications of his long early development, he was prepared to write the Six Little Piano Pieces, Opus 19, one of the shortest and certainly one of the most influential compositions of this century. Reflections of these little pieces—rhythmic, intervallic, melodic—turn up repeatedly in the works of subsequent composers.

In the same way Schoenberg explored the first implications of row composition in his Suite, Op. 23, and brought them just about to total realization in the Dance Suite, Op. 26. Except the two short studies, Op. 33, Schoenberg used the second half of his creative life exploring in larger forms the techniques reached earlier by the laboratory successions of his few piano pieces.

Sincerely,  
Dorothy Moskowitz  
126 Hollister Avenue  
Santa Monica, Calif.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

by John Gloriano  
(courtesy of Something Else Press)

FIGURE 3. Manifesto Joseph Byrd, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 24 (17 June 1966): 8





Evening Concerts were by 1966 a reputable Los Angeles mainstay devoted to performing and promoting modern music.<sup>4</sup> To the members of the Hippodrome, however, the concerts had become stagnant and their organizers guilty of the same hypocrisy that their dedication to underappreciated music was meant to counter. Whereas the program for the “Homage to Schoenberg” could have appeared intact at a Monday Evening Concert, the accompanying manifestos reflect the new, critical attitude of the younger group. Fueled by a desire to enact positive social change, this young avant-garde appealed to younger and more diverse audiences. Borrowing another phrase from Bürger, they sought to “reintegrate art into the praxis of life” by presenting challenging new art as an edifying complement to the contemporary everyday experience.<sup>5</sup>

The following account of these radicals of modern music will underscore Bürger’s progression, focusing not only on their resentments toward a perceived establishment, but also on their critique of ideological institutions on the largest scale. The principal vantage points are the pages of the *Los Angeles Free Press*. One of the area’s first and most influential underground newspapers, the *Free Press* published numerous articles and advertisements by the members of this group, who in turn considered the paper to be one of their principal means of publicizing events and disseminating ideas. Viewed this way the historical progression is clear. In the paper’s early issues, articles on music tended to echo the pro-modernist proclivities of the Monday Evening Concerts. By the mid-1960s, however, the content had shifted to reflect the more subversive stance of the Los Angeles Hippodrome, whose values were further disseminated through a series of *Free Press*-sponsored concerts. Although the group was well received, its time in the limelight was limited. One particularly controversial performance soured its reputation with the *Free Press* readership and opened a door for the Freak movement, a distinctly Los Angeles manifestation of the 1960s hippie counterculture led by iconoclastic rock musician Frank Zappa, to exert greater influence on the paper’s cultural direction.

<sup>4</sup> Significant research has already been done on the Evenings on the Roof and Monday Evening Concerts. For a thorough treatment of the subject, see Dorothy L. Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939–1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also Arthur Morton and Herbert Morton, eds., *Monday Evening Concerts 1954–1971: The Lawrence Morton Years* (Los Angeles: Arthur and Herbert Morton for the Lawrence Morton Fund, 1993); Peter Yates, “The Morphogenesis of Ideas,” in *Twentieth Century Music: Its Evolution from the End of the Harmonic Era into the Present Era of Sound* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 189; and Lawrence Morton, “Music and the Listener (1957),” in *Monday Evening Concerts 1954–1971*, ix–x.

<sup>5</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22.

From this perspective the Los Angeles Hippodrome appears to be a transitional phenomenon. A concert such as the “Homage to Schoenberg,” then, would best be considered the product of a momentary overlap between the high-modernist programming of the Monday Evening Concerts and the radical aesthetic of the emerging youth counterculture. But this would be an oversimplification, particularly in a city described by geographer Michael Dear as a “polycentric, polycultural, polyglot metropolis.”<sup>6</sup> The story is further complicated by the fact that all three groups—the Monday Evening Concerts, the Los Angeles Hippodrome, and the Freak movement—existed not in neat chronological blocks, but simultaneously. They shared audiences, performance spaces, and media coverage while espousing aesthetic ideas and loyalties that were not nearly as unique as they claimed. To explain this phenomenon, I turn to Dear and Edward Soja’s more recent work on the complex Los Angeles cityscape, which proposes a reconfiguration of social theory and analysis in geo-spatial terms.

*The Free Press and its Contributors*

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On 1 May 1964 a former tool and die maker dressed as Robin Hood could be seen distributing an eight-page pamphlet, *The Faire Free Press*, at the Southern California Renaissance Faire.<sup>7</sup> Shortly thereafter Art Kunkin resumed his normal persona and secured sufficient financial backing to turn the pamphlet into a weekly publication: the *Los Angeles Free Press*. Modeled after New York’s *Village Voice*, the *Free Press* was devoted mainly to the social scene surrounding the Freak movement and the New Left in Los Angeles. Kunkin’s weekly periodical quickly grew in popularity and by the end of the decade had become one of the most widely distributed and influential underground papers of the era.

The *Free Press* stood out among its peers for its balance of cultural and political reporting. In the mid-1960s most of the few alternative newspapers in circulation built their reputations by touting either a particular cultural or political ideology, but not both. The *Berkeley Barb*, for example, was unabashed in its political agenda.<sup>8</sup> This preoccupation with

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Laurence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 27. According to the front page of Kunkin’s publication, the event at which it was distributed was the “KPFK-FM Pleasure Faire and May Market.” Subsequent publications have referred to the event as the “Southern California Renaissance Faire.” See Victoria Goff, “Alternative and Underground Newspapers,” in *Encyclopedia of Journalism*, ed. D. Charles Whitney and Sterling (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), 81.

<sup>8</sup> According to Laurence Leamer, author of one of the earliest histories of the underground press, “The paper did not pretend to be a paradigm of the New Culture. Rather, the *Barb* set out to cover as news the New Left, drug culture, sexual freedom, occult, police brutality, macrobiotics, and all the other schemes and dreams that lived together

“proselytizing for the Movement,” as historian Laurence Leamer puts it, left little space for articles on music, art, theatre, or film.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the *San Francisco Oracle* and the *East Village Other* were as culturally oriented as the *Barb* was political. Founded in late 1965, both the *Oracle* and the *Other* were firmly dedicated to promoting the emergent countercultural lifestyle. As a result, these papers offered very little in the way of hard news.<sup>10</sup> In each of these cases the tendencies of the newspaper reflected community priorities.<sup>11</sup> Berkeley, for example, was a hotbed of leftist political fervor but was far less involved in the hippie music scene than Haight Ashbury or the East Village.

The *Free Press* was similarly tied to its environment, affected not only by the blossoming LA social scene, but also by the city’s political tensions. The paper was not directed at any particular demographic. Instead it made a conscious appeal to all individuals feeling disenfranchised by the status quo.<sup>12</sup> Reportage on local events was, for Kunkin—who had previously been employed as the business manager for *The Militant*, the official platform publication of the Socialist Worker’s Party—a fundamental concern: “When I worked for socialist magazines like the *Militant* I had always felt that they weren’t part of a real movement [ . . . ]. I wanted the *Free Press* to build a local movement base.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, contributing writers were particularly concerned with issues of censorship, local and state politics, and racial tension as they pertained to the Los Angeles community.

The politically charged nature of the *Free Press*, stemming from Kunkin’s socialist background, was a defining characteristic. Many of the paper’s writers shared a marked distrust of political institutions and

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uncomfortably in the Movement. The *Barb* made clear that it was proselytizing for the Movement, and when outraged townspeople condemned the paper as ‘propaganda,’ they might just as well have criticized *Business Week* as a shill for capitalism or *Women’s Wear Daily* as a creature of Seventh Avenue.” Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 34. *Oracle* founder Allen Cohen’s article, “*The San Francisco Oracle*. A Brief History,” confirms Leamer’s observations about the publication. Cohen explains that his primary purpose with the paper was to provide a voice for what he saw as an extremely important focal point for American culture in the 1960s; Allen Cohen, “The San Francisco Oracle: A Brief History,” in *Voices from the Underground*, Vol. 1: *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (Tempe: Mica Press, 1993), 131–64. Leamer describes both publications as being fully immersed in their cultural surroundings, particularly the *Oracle*, which “was the first underground paper to consciously try to integrate itself into the community it served.” Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion of how the San Francisco radical cultural scene rejected radical politics, see Christopher Gair’s analysis of Jerry Garcia’s comments on Jerry Rubin in Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 132.

<sup>12</sup> According to Leamer, this broad appeal is what made the *Free Press* so effective as a revolutionary publication. Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Kunkin in *ibid.*, 27.

authorities. The tone and underlying anti-establishment sentiment of Doc Stanley's 1966 article, "Policemanship: A Guide," is typical:

Your life and future depend on how you handle yourself in your contacts with the police. If you handle yourself poorly you will go to jail, be subjected to police harassment, get beaten up or perhaps even killed. If you handle yourself well, you will be permitted to continue your life as a free citizen. Policemanship is perhaps the most important art one can learn in contemporary America.<sup>14</sup>

But the *Free Press* was equally influential for its cultural voice. Strong ties to the community meant that the intermingling of cultural and political elements in radical Los Angeles society would also find its way into the paper.

Like its East Coast counterpart in Manhattan's East Village, the voice of the *Free Press* was equally important in both cultural and political arenas.<sup>15</sup> The radical charge of the *Free Press*, however, would tie it not to emergent hippie folk or rock idioms, but to contemporary art music—a tendency that contrasts sharply with the typical treatment given by retrospective histories of the underground press.<sup>16</sup> Articles on music-related topics in the paper's early years devoted much more attention to modernist composition than to leading popular genres. These articles conveyed a marked degree of frustration concerning the poor health of new music in Los Angeles and appealed to readers to take up the challenges of contemporary art.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Doc Stanley, "Policemanship: A Guide," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 7 (18 February 1966): 7.

<sup>15</sup> Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries*, 27–28.

<sup>16</sup> Even in more recent publications particular attention is paid to rock and pop groups while other artistic communities are rarely mentioned. Consider Bob Hippler's history of the *Fifth Estate*, an alternative publication from Detroit. Hippler describes how the newspaper's founder, Harvey Ovshinsky, was inspired to start an underground paper in his native Detroit after spending time at a Los Angeles coffeehouse. "Ovshinsky began hanging out with the denizens of the coffeehouse and soon began helping out any way he could on the *Los Angeles Free Press*. He was captivated by its antiwar politics, its concern for developing a radical Los Angeles community, and its coverage of the local music scene, which in coming years was to produce legendary groups like Arthur Lee's Love, Jim Morrison's Doors, and Roger McGuinn's Byrds." Hippler stresses the importance of the local music scene, but rather than describing the scene as it existed at the time, he invokes bands that would not gain significant popularity in Los Angeles for several years. Bob Hippler, "Fast Times in the Motor City—The First Ten Years of the Fifth Estate: 1965–1975," in *Voices from the Underground*, ed. Ken Wachsherger (Tempe: Mica Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>17</sup> This is not meant to imply that performances of music written before 1900 were always cast in a negative light. Indeed, some *Free Press* writers seem to have been quite fond of classical music. See, for example, Sol Babitz, "Opera at the Shrine," *Los Angeles Free Press* 1, no. 19 (26 November 1964): 11; and Jim Maxwell, "Wagner Chorale Frustrating Notes," *Los Angeles Free Press* 1, no. 12 (8 October 1964): 5. Some writers were even concerned with

Writers for the *Free Press*, several of whom were also composers, had a personal interest in the success of what they considered avant-garde music. Contributors included Michael Agnello, a local composer and leftist political radical; Byrd, a one-time student of John Cage and founder of the controversial New Music Workshop at UCLA; and Richard Grayson, one of UCLA's first recipients of a doctorate in music composition, now professor emeritus at Occidental College.<sup>18</sup> Considering that most of the music composed by this circle was indebted to John Cage, it should come as little surprise that these composers met resistance from Los Angeles audiences. This resistance included the UCLA Music Department, which cut funding to Byrd's New Music Workshop in 1966 because of his controversial programming decisions.<sup>19</sup> Yates, the founder of the Monday Evening Concerts, made occasional contributions to the paper as well, but was generally dismissed by the others as being an old-fashioned representative of an outdated avant-garde.<sup>20</sup>

Yates aside, these individuals comprised a tight-knit group. They regularly reported on each other's work and used the *Free Press* to serve "as apologists for one another."<sup>21</sup> In a February 1965 issue of the paper, Grayson promoted an upcoming concert of compositions by Byrd. He described Byrd as "one of the bright lights among the younger West Coast avant-garde composers."<sup>22</sup> Several months later Byrd returned the favor, praising Grayson's music for having "acquired a dimension of experiment equal to any being done in the East or in Europe" and expressing concern as to "[w]hether Los Angeles can keep him" given his doubts about "the readiness of Los Angeles for the avante-garde [*sic*] community."<sup>23</sup>

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things like classical performance practice. See, for example, Sol Babitz, "But Would Bach Buy Bouncy Super Bow?," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 15 (9 April 1965): 5.

<sup>18</sup> In an e-mail message to the author Grayson recalled, "I was number three [to receive a doctorate in composition from UCLA]. I think I took more time than necessary (1964–1969), but I was also using the time to try to grow as a musician and figure out what it was that I really wanted to do. I found that I was really suited to an academic environment." (19 December 2012.)

<sup>19</sup> The UCLA graduate student association stepped in to provide the necessary funds for the program to continue, but the severance of ties by the Music Department had a lasting effect. Several months later Agnello wrote that "the tyrannical attitude of the Music Department towards the New Music Workshop may be viewed as the grumbings of the old chiefs as they make a last ditch stand in the crumbling cultural ruins of the American University." Michael Agnello, "Int'l Steamed Spring Vegetable Pies Hold Last Concept Art Concert at UCLA," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 13 (1 April 1966): 11.

<sup>20</sup> Agnello, for example, refers to Yates in a letter to the editor as a "Don Quixote" on 9 September 1966. Michael Agnello, "[letter to the Editor]," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 36 (9 September 1966): 4.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Grayson, "Joseph Byrd at Ashgrove," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 8 (19 February 1965): 7.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Byrd, "Richard Grayson: Avant-Garde Musician," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 20 (14 May 1965): 11. In a recent e-mail Byrd recalls that Grayson's ties to the rest of the

In addition to praising art created by members of their own circle, contributing authors focused on several major themes in their writing. Articles on music in the *Free Press* routinely lamented the state of contemporary art by dismissing older traditions as dull or irrelevant while promoting new music as vital and exciting. They complained about the lack of support for local artists by the community and various private institutions. And in many cases they espoused the benefits of listening to new music as a means of social betterment while endorsing a type of art that—experimental though it might be—would engage with the experiences of everyday life.

Many of these articles were unsolicited. In a recent e-mail Agnello recalled his relationship with Kunkin and the paper:

Art Kunkin was willing to publish anything that I'd write, including new music reviews, on music generally, etc. I was never paid for these. He would graciously edit my writing and run it in the next or following week's paper. [ . . . ] The L.A. Free Press with him as editor served a wonderful niche for the underground art, war protest, social consciousness movements that were so powerfully fomenting in those times. I've never seen any other paper assume such a dynamic interaction with the community.<sup>24</sup>

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Given that their livelihoods depended on the reception of contemporary art, it should come as no surprise that these authors felt compelled to promote new music in the *Free Press*. New music, as their articles make clear, faced many obstacles in Los Angeles, particularly since they were not always able to depend on university patronage. Contributors to the *Free Press* regularly decried the conservative programming choices of the city's classical music organizations. One writer warned readers to "not look for many surprises" in the 1964-1965 concert schedule of the L.A. Philharmonic and blamed aesthetically conservative socialites for dull programming: "The big problem is the pivotal role the orchestra plays in LA society—such as it is. The grand dames and their junior league counterparts want no one making waves. The programs will continue to be uninspired and uninspiring."<sup>25</sup>

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group were not particularly strong, suggesting that the article might be better understood as a political gesture: "Richard was a highly competent musician/composer, but actually not particularly experimental—of all of us, the only one who was stylistically flexible enough to actually get his doctorate." (Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 8 July 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Tierra, e-mail message to the author, 27 January 2013. (Michael Agnello changed his name to Michael Tierra. For the sake of clarity, I use his original surname in the body of this essay, reserving his new name for footnotes to distinguish his older writings from more recent e-mail messages.)

<sup>25</sup> Ed Cray, "L.A. Philharmonic: No Waves Expected," *Los Angeles Free Press* 1, no. 11 (1 October 1964): 3. This particular article also takes advantage of an opportunity to

The *Free Press* presented new music as an invigorating alternative to typical classical fare, ripe with artistic potential. One concert review from 1965 finds Agnello praising a performance by the newly formed Trojan String Quartet. Agnello is optimistic about the group's potential and hopes that they "gradually find works which are a bit less played in order to cultivate their own individual approach" instead of "being hampered by works heavily laden with a tradition."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere Agnello lauded a performance by John Cage and David Tudor, praising the duo for their originality and vitality: "Here were two men who had something new to say. For once it was made clear that the work of art and the artist are one."<sup>27</sup> For Agnello and his colleagues Cage had an energy and relevance they found lacking in traditional performances of older Western art music.

Along similar lines writers routinely expressed a low opinion of the city of Los Angeles for failing to support local arts. Byrd is particularly adamant about this in his 1965 profile of Grayson. "The maturity of a city as a musical center," Byrd declares, "might be said to arrive when it produces an original indigenous art movement."<sup>28</sup> Byrd points to San Francisco—"traditionally the most culturally progressive city on the West Coast"—and praises the city's ability to support an ongoing center for avant-garde music, the San Francisco Tape Music Center. In Los Angeles, however, "experimentalists [...] have been able to establish a beach-head only at UCLA."<sup>29</sup> But even there Byrd encountered strong disapproval from conservative faculty members. In a review of a 1965 piano recital, Agnello expresses frustration at the difficulty of simply finding such performances: "Occasionally, you'll discover some very interesting musical events in the Los Angeles area—that is, if you are willing to look in out-of-the-way places and respond to limited publicity."<sup>30</sup>

In a 1965 review of a Monday Evening Concert, Agnello expresses doubt as to whether the series had lived up to its reputation as the preeminent venue for contemporary music in Los Angeles:

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distance the *Free Press* from other Los Angeles newspapers: "The most musical excitement will be the inevitable furor about the acoustics [of the new orchestral hall]. Even that is predictable. The *Los Angeles Times* will praise them. The [Los Angeles] *Herald* [-Examiner] will not. Yawn." Byrd's current perspective is more sympathetic: "The LA Phil was a dinosaur, yes, but it had always been conservative, and it would be futile to criticize it for doing what was generally the mandate of its subscribers." (Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Agnello, "String Quartet at Manne-Hole," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 18 (30 April 1965): 7.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Agnello, "John Cage at Pasadena," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 5 (29 January 1965): 5.

<sup>28</sup> Byrd, "Richard Grayson: Avant-Garde Musician," 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Agnello, "Blackwood Piano Concert," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 47 (19 November 1965): 7.

It seems to me that the biggest problem facing Monday Evening Concerts is not whether they can get good performances of infrequently heard music but whether the series, which has always represented a challenge to the average music patron, will continue to do so. This necessarily means that the directors be flexible enough to continue the policy of representing the newest trends in contemporary music. I remember attending Monday Evening Concerts when they were in West Hollywood Park Auditorium. I felt that there was a sense of musical adventure in that environment which must be created anew in the present location.<sup>31</sup>

He sees potential in the series, but goes on to prescribe a sponsored “visit by the Once Group from Ann Arbor, Michigan,” suggesting that enlisting outside help might jumpstart the local scene.<sup>32</sup>

In 1964 Agnello had attempted to launch a contemporary music series of his own to “showcase [...] the many diverse styles of musical compositions being written by composers in the [Southern California] area.”<sup>33</sup> Looking back on the venture, Agnello explains that the series was born in part out of personal frustration: “For me it was, ‘if you don’t want to invite me to perform on your concert series, hell, I’ll just make my own.’”<sup>34</sup> Agnello’s “Concerts at the Ash Grove” were to feature entire

<sup>31</sup> Michael Agnello, “Monday Evening Concert,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 43 (22 October 1965): 7. In a recent e-mail to the author, however, Tierra remembers the concerts in a much more positive light: “I loved [the] Monday Evening Concerts. The programs always seemed fresh, exciting, and of course with an emphasis on contemporary music. It was frequented by a major part of the L.A. intelligentsia. One night I found myself sitting across the aisle from Aldous Huxley, for instance. The only problem I had which I tried to remedy in my own significantly more modest offering was that the entrance fee was not something the new generation of street people who may have also shared an interest in the new, could afford. I went to several concerts but honestly, I don’t know [how] I afforded the price of the ticket. I think somehow tickets just fell into my hands.” (27 January 2013.)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Agnello, “Concerts at the Ashgrove,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 1, no. 18 (19 November 1964): 7. In this promotional article for the second season of the series, Agnello elaborates on his mission, criticizing the UCLA Music Department and the LA Philharmonic along the way: “It is an unfortunate trend in our time to expect our universities, even supposing them to be the stronghold of liberalism which they are not, to almost single-handedly furnish all avenues for the performance of new music. I believe this would be a serious mistake due to the built-in prejudices of these institutions by their administration as well as their professors. This is not offered as a criticism, but simply as a statement of fact. Furthermore, most patrons of contemporary music have long since given up the possibility that programs offered by the L.A. Philharmonic, Hollywood Bowl or the Local 47 Musicians Union will ever be able or willing (at least in the near future) to supply significant avenues for the performance of new works by composers whose worth is still to be decided. Since these programs are not a part of the Ash Grove’s regular presentations, they must operate on a self-sustaining basis. The concerts therefore rely on public support. Every indication is that the programs will be both exciting and diversified so any music-lover who is in search of an entertaining as well as a challenging evening of musical fare, should be well rewarded by attending Concerts at the Ash Grove programs.”

<sup>34</sup> Tierra, e-mail message to the author, 27 January 2013.



programs of works by Grayson—"one of the most promising young talents on the Los Angeles contemporary music scene"—and the "highly controversial music" of Byrd.<sup>35</sup> The series continued for two seasons and then folded. According to Agnello, who describes the many problems he encountered in a 1966 article for the *Free Press*, the failure of the series was due in no small part to the stifling "hothouse atmosphere" of the UCLA Music Department and the lack of coverage by the local press.<sup>36</sup>

When Agnello, Byrd, and Grayson extol the virtues of new, indigenous music, it is hard not to read their articles as thinly veiled advertisements for their own work. Personal interest aside, however, these writers also expressed a belief in the potential for avant-garde art to benefit society as a whole. From their point of view, new music "has always represented a challenge to the average music patron."<sup>37</sup> Because of this perspective, their articles often took on a didactic tone, offering assistance and encouragement to the uninitiated reader. Noting that "a single hearing is hardly ever sufficient" to remedy the "problem the layman has in understanding avant-garde music," Joanne Forman, another contributor, offers readers "a brief discography" of recordings by John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Morton Feldman, Pierre Boulez, and Edgard Varèse, among others.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Agnello tended to append brief history lessons to his reviews, presumably to educate the reader on the rhetorical/theoretical justifications of difficult art.<sup>39</sup>

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The composers these writers promoted were fundamentally concerned with extending the experience of everyday life. Recall Bürger's description of the historical avant-garde and its attack on art in bourgeois

<sup>35</sup> Agnello, "Concerts at the Ashgrove," 7.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Agnello, "L.A. Music—Upbeat and Downtown," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 1 (7 January 1966): 4. Looking back on the series, Tierra writes: "I did all of this with barely a few [bucks] in my pocket. Don't ask me how. I just presented myself to the owner of the Ashgrove with an idea he liked and it happened. Similarly I never had any vested financial connection with the Ashgrove, the L.A. Free Press. In those days there was always a number of people who found themselves caught up with a conventional lifestyle and wanted to maintain some semblance of financial security while going maverick by association with the offbeat, the likes of people such as myself. It was a strange marriage and none of us really knew what we were doing other than the fact that we were at least 'sort-a' doing it." Tierra, email message to the author, 27 January 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Agnello, "Monday Evening Concert," 7.

<sup>38</sup> Joanne Forman, "A Brief Discography: Avant-Garde Music," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 2 (8 January 1965): 5. Forman also suggested recordings by Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, Bruno Maderna, Henry Brant, Henry Cowell, Carl Ruggles, Earle Brown, Alois Haba, Jan Novak, Lou Harrison, Christian Wolff, and Stefan Wolpe.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, his "Blackwood Piano Concert" in the 19 November 1965 issue of the *Free Press* in which Agnello asserts that "To understand Stockhausen's point of view [that 'all music composed before Webern, such as penned by Mozart, belongs in a museum'], you must realize how Webern's music actually represents a radical departure from the past and, as such, requires a fundamentally new way of listening." Agnello, "Blackwood Piano Concert," 7.

society: "What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men."<sup>40</sup> Composers like John Cage—whom Agnello now remembers as "the ultimate hero of the avant-garde"—wrote music that engaged its immediate environment and forced its audiences to reevaluate their own definitions of music and art in general.<sup>41</sup> In the same gushing review of the Cage/Tudor performance mentioned above, Agnello writes: "Lawrence Lipton made a statement to the effect that they used the entire room as a musical instrument. I thought to myself, why only the room, why not the whole world?"<sup>42</sup> In another article, Agnello describes the outdoor setting of Concerts at the Ash Grove series as essential to the success of the music:

This allows the music to be a part of the unpredictable current of life, which is much in contrast to the familiar hot-house concerts held in tomblike auditoriums. An informal atmosphere helps to encourage a vital communication between the composer, audience and the performer.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Grayson describes Byrd's "interest in music and movement resulting from functional acts" and posits that it "is no doubt related to the new art, which is interested in presenting everyday objects in a context permitting vital or revitalized perception of them."<sup>44</sup> In a positive review of a local gallery's presentation of artistic handicrafts another contributor suggests that "it is possible for beauty to infuse and inform our daily lives in a number of ways" and that "[i]t should be possible for us to enjoy a wide spectrum of good art in our personal lives."<sup>45</sup>

In a lengthy polemic titled "Abdication of the Performing Arts," Byrd summarizes his perspective:

I propose that we accept only that art which contributes to that perceptual extension [of personal aesthetic experience], art which recognizes those elements of our world that generate perceptual excitement.<sup>46</sup>

Byrd's words are a heartfelt statement on the status and future of the arts and seem to place him and his colleagues at the *Free Press* squarely in line with the mission of the Monday Evening Concerts. All of their

<sup>40</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Tierra, e-mail message to the author, 27 January 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Agnello, "John Cage at Pasadena," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 5 (29 January 1965): 5.

<sup>43</sup> Agnello, "Concerts at the Ashgrove," 7.

<sup>44</sup> Grayson, "Joseph Byrd at Ashgrove," 7.

<sup>45</sup> Lair Mitchell, "The Minor Arts," *Los Angeles Free Press* 2, no. 2 (8 January 1965): 5.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Byrd, "Abdication of the Performing Arts," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 34 (26 August 1966): 9.

motivations—the concern for the state of contemporary art, the disdain for what they saw as oppressive older traditions, the belief in the value of encouraging local music—had been shared by Yates, his successor Lawrence Morton, and other members their circle.<sup>47</sup>

Both groups were relentless in their advocacy of contemporary music, viewing themselves as noble underdogs in their crusade to defend authentic art.<sup>48</sup> And yet despite these similarities, Byrd and Agnello distance themselves from the Monday Evening Concerts. In the aforementioned profile on Grayson, Byrd dismisses the series as “the conservative, Establishment wing of contemporary music in Southern California.”<sup>49</sup> For Byrd at least the disdain was well-justified:

The musical scene was highly polarized and politicized. For instance, after Leonard Stein asked me for, and received, a piano sonata (now disappeared as far as I know), he was not allowed to play it on the Monday Evening Series. So my writing certainly wasn't “objective”—I was resentful of the establishment, for good reason.<sup>50</sup>

Personal issues aside, differences between the two groups may have been hard to notice from an outside perspective. But by the mid 1960s the distinctions became more explicit, particularly in regard to the names of high-profile artists being dropped in various publications.

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The reputation of the Monday Evening Concerts was built on their dedication to composers such as Ives and Bartók, as well as a handful from a younger generation, including Berio and Boulez. Distancing himself from these modernist leanings, Agnello describes his group's heroes in a review of a New Music Workshop concert put on by Byrd in 1966:

<sup>47</sup> Byrd and Agnello were even marginally engaged with the early music movement. A small advertisement on the fifth page of the 9 December 1966 issue of the *Free Press* announces that, “[t]he premier performance of the Los Angeles Pro Musica Antiqua under the direction of Michael Agnello and Joseph Byrd will include works of the 16th and 17th centuries and the ‘Prolation Mass’ by Ockeghem, at the Pasadena Art Museum on Wednesday Dec. 14 at 8:30 pm.” “Pro Musica Antiqua Announces Premiere,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 49 (9 December 1966): 5.

<sup>48</sup> Responding to a question about the intensity of this antagonism, Byrd writes: “I don’t see a rivalry, though. A rivalry would be some kind of struggle between contending forces, and I had no forces except a small group of interesting minds.” Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Byrd, “Richard Grayson: Avant-Garde Musician,” 11.

<sup>50</sup> Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 8 July 2010. In a later e-mail, Byrd’s tone becomes even more critical: “My enemy was MEC, Peter Yates, and the people who claimed to be progressive.” Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010. Grayson, incidentally, had more luck: his 1966 composition “Happy and Melancholy” was performed at the 30 March 1970 Monday Evening Concert.

Some of the mid-century's most important artistic innovations are originally conceived by musicians with John Cage "hiking, playing left tackle and quarterback."

Those who have caught the ball include dancers such as Merce Cunningham and Ann Halprin; painters such as Raushenberg [*sic*] and the whole pop-art movement: film makers such as Andy Warhol; and musicians such as Morton Feldman, Earl Brown, Stockhausen, Busotti, Ichiyanagi, and Joseph Byrd (to name a few).<sup>51</sup>

For many, the radical ideas coming from these young experimentalists were invigorating. In a recent e-mail Grayson recalled being

enthralled by the freedom and improvisatory aspects of the "new music" they had brought with them. Joseph Byrd, with his experiences in New York in the late 50s (I believe) and early 60s with Cage and others, was especially influential on me. He was charismatic and had some of the "rebel" in him which made this music seem attractive and liberating.<sup>52</sup>

For his own part, Byrd described Cage as "my idol, the most important composer of the 20th century."<sup>53</sup>

More significantly, the members of the Los Angeles Hippodrome embraced certain aspects of the counterculture and radical politics. In another review Agnello cites interests in contemporary leftist movements and rock 'n' roll as primary among the group's defining characteristics:

Joseph Byrd and members of the UCLA New Music Workshop are examples of talented exponents of the New Music, who have been harassed and slowly straight-jacketed by the UCLA Music Department. They are coming to agree with the Music Department that the university is not the place for their music. It is also relevant that Joseph Byrd, out of certain convictions that stem from his involvement with the Free Speech Movement, has gone outside of the university to organize the New Left School of Los Angeles. Along with a large number of other experimental composers, Byrd has demonstrated an active interest in the popular or folk music of many cultures, including Rock 'n' Roll.<sup>54</sup>

Byrd remembered his work in Los Angeles as "the flower that sprang from the seed of musically experimental and politically radical thought."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Agnello, "Int'l Steamed Spring Vegetable Pies Hold Last Concept Art Concert at UCLA," 11.

<sup>52</sup> Grayson, e-mail message to the author, 19 December 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Agnello, "UCLA Music Workshop: Steamed International Vegetable Pie," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 3 (21 January 1966): 4, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010.

### *The Free Press Concerts*

A reading of their contributions to the *Free Press* may suggest that individuals such as Agnello, Grayson, and Byrd were simply taking advantage of a fledgling newspaper to promote their own struggling art. Indeed, many of the concerts advertised in the paper featured works composed and performed by the writers themselves. Several important events, however, show how this group began to exert influence on the larger *Free Press* readership and how, in turn, the community responded to their radical ideas.

On 18 February 1966, at the former Aerospace Hall in Los Angeles, Agnello presented a “Concert Happening” as a benefit for the *Free Press*.<sup>56</sup> (An advertisement for the event from the 18 February issue of the newspaper is reproduced in fig. 4.<sup>57</sup> A map showing the location of Aerospace Hall and other locations mentioned here may be found in fig. 5.) The concert program featured “canons by Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern” as well as Cage’s *Aria* and *Fontana Mix*, but otherwise comprised works by contemporary Los Angeles composers.<sup>58</sup> Performances included dancing, reading, and pseudo-psychedelic visual projections. According to the advertisement, Grayson and Byrd each appeared on the program twice, whereas Agnello had four of his pieces played.<sup>59</sup> The ad features a whimsical hodge-podge of fonts for the main headline. It also

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<sup>56</sup> In the 4 February 1966 issue of the *Free Press*, a small ad appeared on page 9 announcing a “¡¡contest!! I hate concerts because . . .” The contest asked participants to “in 25 words or less state the reason(s) you detest concerts.” The winner was promised a year’s subscription to the *Free Press* and two tickets to “the world’s first, all-time great, unborning concert!” a premier of Agnello’s *Sounds & Sights*, which promised “lots of undetectable music.” The title of the 18 February event—“Concert Happening”—is therefore quite significant. Agnello is distancing himself from the art-music concert tradition and edging closer to the phenomenon of countercultural “happenings.” “¡¡contest!! I Hate Concerts Because . . . [advertisement],” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 5 (4 February 1966): 9.

<sup>57</sup> The following description of the event is derived from the information printed in this advertisement and a summary/review of the concert in the following issue of the *Free Press*. I have not been able to find any mention of the event in other area publications.

<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting that these were also the first compositions by Cage to be featured in a Monday Evening Concert.

<sup>59</sup> I have been unable to track down a copy of the program for the event—if indeed one exists. According to the advertisement, the concert was to include performances of the following pieces: *Piece for Cellist and Audience* (Darton Bont) performed by Fred Katz (formerly with Chico Hamilton Quintet); *Study No. 1* (Richard Grayson); *Voces Aequales* (Richard Grayson); *Mass* (Joseph Byrd); *The Defense of the AMERICAN Continent from the VIET Cong INVASION* (Joseph Byrd); *Song of the Cleadas* (Dorothy Moskowitz); *Piece of Violinist and Chorus* (Michael Agnello); “Vocalize” for Chorus (Michael Agnello); Two Early Choruses from *Pomes Penyeach* (James Joyce); *Nightpiece* (Michael Agnello); *Watching the Needleboats at San Sabla* (Michael Agnello); and a dance improvisation by Drury Cohen and Kate Hughes-Pearl. A brief announcement in the same issue mentions that the program was also to include “two pieces of concept art by Jan Naim Paik [*sic*] and La Monte Young (the furthest-out composers of today).” “Happening Friday Feb. 18,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 7 (18 February 1966): 7.

FIGURE 4. “Concert Happening” advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 7 (18 February 1966): 5



incorporates a distinctive DIY collage aesthetic—reminiscent of John Heartfield’s photomontages—that was at the time gaining popularity among counterculture youth, suggesting some distance from typical (stodgy) performances of new music.

A review in the following issue of the *Free Press* describes the event as “a true happening where the audience was involved, antagonized and delighted by the aesthetic experience.”<sup>60</sup> Compared to a typical Monday Evening Concert, the *Free Press* Concert Happening was much more humorous and risqué. It was also remarkably antagonistic toward traditional artistic boundaries. One of the pieces, Darton Bont’s *Piece for Cellist and Audience*, featured extensive audience participation and incorporated topical political material:

The audience at signals left their seats, danced around under the direction of dancer Drury Cohen, and finally were active in a kind of mass meeting atmosphere in which Doc Stanley's Free Press article

<sup>60</sup> “Agnello Stages a Concert Happening Which Really, Really Did Happen,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 8 (25 February 1966): 1. According to a recent e-mail from Concert Happening participant Dorothy Falarski (at the time Dorothy Moskowitz), “[t]here was a recording done that night and to my eternal regret, the machine had a serious wobble so it was useless.” (19 November 2012.)

FIGURE 5. Map of Los Angeles neighborhoods and other locations: (1) A.I.A.A. (“Aerospace”) Hall, 7660 Beverly Blvd.; (2) Evenings on the Roof (Peter Yates’s house), 1735 Micheltorena St.; (3) Fifth Estate coffee house (original Free Press headquarters), 8226 Sunset Blvd.; (4) Los Angeles Free Press headquarters, 5903 Melrose Ave.; (5) UCLA, Westwood; (6) Los Angeles Music Center (LA Phil), 135 North Grand Ave.; (7) Hollywood Bowl, 2301 N. Highland Ave.; (8) Ash Grove, 8162 Melrose Ave.; (9) Shrine Exposition Hall, 700 W. 32nd St.; (10) PROCESS site, 1953 Arlington Ave.



on Policemanship was read aloud with the audience cheering, booing, and yelling slogans as they chose.<sup>61</sup>

Another of the works performed, “Piece for Allison Knowles” by Nam June Paik, featured the performer, Sandra Gill, who removed thirty or so pairs of undergarments from beneath a full-length evening gown and heaped them on a chair. The anonymous author of the review cites Gill’s performance as “the high point of the whole evening,” particularly when, in conclusion, she lifted her skirt to the delight of the audience.<sup>62</sup> That such spectacle might appear alongside performances of music by Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg speaks to how much this group had already begun to interact with the politics of the New Left and the absurd theatrics of the Freak movement.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. It seems likely that the article was written by Agnello himself, given his involvement in planning the event, the familiar tone, and conspicuous lack of any reference to performances of his own works.

Several months later, on 24 June 1966, another event took place at Aerospace Hall. Presented by the Los Angeles Hippodrome and sponsored by the *Free Press*, the "Homage to Arnold Schoenberg" was intended to be part of "an ongoing series of primarily avant-garde concerts and events" (figs. 1-3). As the title makes clear, the concert featured a full program of Schoenberg's works. And once again the event was touted as a full-on, multimedia experience; in addition to performances of Schoenberg's *Phantasy*, Op. 47, *Songs*, Op. 2, and the complete piano works performed by Leonard Stein (a former Schoenberg pupil), Agnello and Byrd showed slides of Schoenberg's paintings accompanied by audio excerpts of his lectures. Whereas this program might seem to indicate a regression to more conventional fare, the accompanying manifestos on the page before the advertisement reveal a layer of complication.

Simultaneously absurd and serious, the manifestos provide an accurate—if convoluted—summary of the group's philosophy. "Art is dead," Agnello begins,

Let us bury it along next to god; and in doing so, let us harken back to a more fundamental state of consciousness where the only worthy successor of art is culture and the only worthy successor of god is the creative spirit of man.

A funeral if you wish, but a joyous funeral, reminiscent of the rites of certain pagan cultures. Only ours will be a circus, a HIPPODROME, where both the performers and the spectators can lose a part of themselves in exchange for their finding a more essential part that lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1966; In America, Los Angeles—NOW.

We will use the materials of L.A.'s immediate culture; it's too late to complain about their appropriateness since the more we complain, the more we find ourselves intimately involved with them.<sup>63</sup>

Agnello goes on to direct the reader to cut these three paragraphs out of the page and soak the paper in milk, chicken broth, and beet juice before pouring the concoction onto a sheet of yellow paper and reading aloud any decipherable words to the accompaniment of a Rolling Stones record. Byrd's cartoon manifesto, as we have already seen, is equally absurd. The other collaborators follow suit: an open letter to Greta Garbo requesting an inheritance of her chinchilla coat, the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence, and a stream-of-consciousness paragraph about the local judicial system.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Michael Agnello, "[Manifesto]," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 24 (17 June 1966): 8.

<sup>64</sup> These manifestos were contributed by Byrd's girlfriend, Dorothy Moskowitz, poet/performance-artist John Giorno, and sculptor Eric Orr, respectively. Other examples of the



The event itself, however, appears to have been largely devoid of the manifestos' irreverent tone. A review in the subsequent issue of the *Free Press* titled "What Became of Arnold S.?" reports,

The total impression of the composer, whom Leonard Stein simply labels "a genius" and "a kind of Moses of the younger generation" is one of an artist of overpowering talents who in all mediums carried his experimentations to their conclusion with taste and a sense of logic. [...] With his status as one of the leading figures in music assured, Schoenberg also emerged at the concert as an artist of startling talents.<sup>65</sup>

Schoenberg, at least to this reviewer, had been presented in the concert as a genius, a true master in the grand Western tradition. But the image of avant-garde art promoted by the "Homage to Arnold Schoenberg" is a far cry from the one suggested by Sandra Gill piling her underwear on a chair. The author of the review in the *Free Press* touches on this duality—"[a]s evidenced by the turnout, it was a music that had appeal to both the long beard as well as the long hair set"—but attributes it to the aesthetic characteristics of the music itself.<sup>66</sup>

It might seem ironic for Agnello and Byrd to present a program devoted entirely to Schoenberg and bill it as an "avant-garde" concert. Their perennial championing of new, experimental art and their break with tradition might be interpreted as dismissive of such an older composer. After all, they were often very critical of the Monday Evening Concerts, an institution that, by this point, had built its reputation on unwavering dedication to the Second Viennese School. Though the aggressive boundary smashing of the "Concert Happening" might seem to suggest a complete dismissal of the Western art-music tradition, the "Homage to Arnold Schoenberg" reveals that this group regarded certain past composers with some reverence.<sup>67</sup> As Agnello recalled, "Schoenberg,

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organizers' lighthearted approach to advertising the event can be found outside of the manifestos. In the same issue of the *Free Press*, the concert is listed in the "Around Town" calendar on the back page. Rather than repeat the time as given by the advertisement mentioned above, the listing indicates that the concert is to begin at "8:29 1/2." In an e-mail Byrd explains the event as a resurrection of his New Music Workshop: "The 'Manifesto' article was all from people in the group I formed from the ashes of The New Music Workshop. [...] Only Ellison [...] and Moore were employed, so it was a pretty shoestring operation. Art Kunkin [...] provided some production money, but concerts just broke even. I was by then deeply involved in 'happenings' and 'environments'—I don't think I actually wrote any music during [this period]." Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Bob Moss, "What Became of Arnold S.?" *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 26 (1 July 1966): 12.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> In the 24 June issue, the *Free Press* ran a piece by Carolyn Fisher, an academic and amateur musician, who recounts a meeting with Schoenberg himself during the winter of 1934–1935. Fisher's reverent tone speaks to how Schoenberg was perceived at the time: "Whether or not one adopts the 'great man' theory of progress, the time of the late

his very name meant all things new, innovative and revolutionary, and I think it infused the entire music scene certainly in Los Angeles.”<sup>68</sup> Defiant though they were, Byrd, Agnello, and their peers never intended to sever themselves from their past completely.<sup>69</sup> Their eclectic musical tastes and the tension between rebellion and indebtedness were defining characteristics of their movement.

*GUAMBO, PROCESS, and Suzy Creamcheese's Manifesto*

On 8 July, shortly after the Los Angeles Hippodrome's homage to Schoenberg, a small box in the middle of the front page of the *Free Press* declared that “GUAMBO is coming” and directed readers to page 5. There, curious readers were greeted with an announcement for “the Great Underground Arts Masked Ball & Orgy,” a celebration of the *Free Press*'s second birthday. Line drawings of revelers, naked but for their masks, adorned the announcement of the event and urged readers to attend the planning meeting (fig. 6). A more detailed advertisement appeared in the following issue (fig. 7). This ad promised a multimedia happening of the highest degree, one for “everybody!” including filmmakers, poets, and tattoo artists (who were encouraged to bring colored markers). Headlining the event would be Frank Zappa's band, The Mothers of Invention.

Several years earlier Zappa had joined The Soul Giants with vocalist Ray Collins, bassist Roy Estrada, and drummer Jimmy Carl Black. For Zappa, the band was first and foremost a necessary source of income. Most of the group's performances took place in bars and nightclubs featuring a repertoire composed primarily of popular cover songs like “Louie Louie” and “Woolly Bully.” But Zappa saw potential in his colleagues and gradually took leadership of the group, changing its artistic trajectory. He encouraged his bandmates to become increasingly experimental in their performances and on Mother's Day in 1964 changed the name of the group to The Mothers.<sup>70</sup> By the summer of 1966, the band

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nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries has been noted by man deeply immersed in the history of music as ripe for a Schoenberg. It has often been pointed out that a fundamental criterion of genius is that it brings about changes which every subsequent worker in the field has to take account of.” Carolyn Fisher, “Memories of an Innovator: Schoenberg in Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 25 (24 June 1966): 14.

<sup>68</sup> Tierra, e-mail message to the author, 27 January 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Their use of the term “avant-garde,” then, seems intended to be a common ground between that which might attract intellectuals and academics (the cerebral poise of 12-tone music) and countercultural youth (the burlesque appeal of a young woman removing her underwear).

<sup>70</sup> The band would be forced to change its name once again in 1966 when it joined with MGM-Verve. The record label was wary about signing a group whose name was a common abbreviation for “motherfuckers,” and required that they adopt the less offensive name “The Mothers of Invention.”

FIGURE 6. "GUAMBO" announcement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 27 (8 July 1966): 6

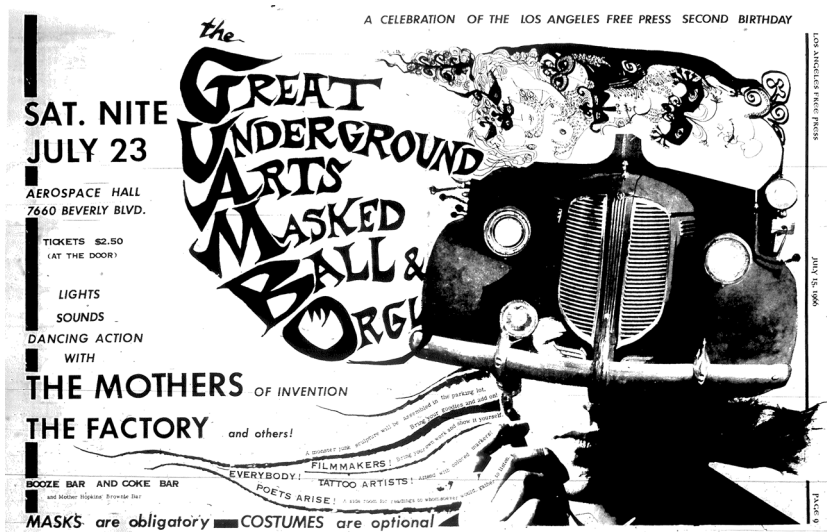


had been gigging steadily around Los Angeles for more than a year. They soon attracted the attention of MGM producer Tom Wilson and released their debut double album *Freak Out!* that same summer. With GUAMBO, the group was heralded as the grand marshals of the Freak movement.

Subsequent accounts of GUAMBO in the *Free Press* describe an event quite different from the Concert Happening and Homage to Schoenberg. Those in attendance danced in extravagant costumes, listened to a sitar player, created action paintings, viewed films, and enjoyed psychedelic light shows. The Mothers of Invention were, in reviewer Jerry Hopkins's opinion, the highlight of the evening.<sup>71</sup> The event was considered a success, but not everything went according to plan. To begin with, GUAMBO drew a far larger crowd than anticipated by the event planners at the *Free Press*. Aerospace Hall management backed out two days before the event due to the prospect of an unmanageable crowd and rumors of

<sup>71</sup> Jerry Hopkins, "GUAMBO Is An Act Of Love—Mothers, Happenings, Dancing," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 30 (29 July 1966): 6.

FIGURE 7. "GUAMBO" advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 28 (15 July 1966): 9



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planned drug use. Organizers were forced to relocate to the nearby Shrine Exhibition Hall. As a result, some two thousand people were turned away at the door.<sup>72</sup> By the end of the evening pressures imposed by the Los Angeles Police Department and fire marshal over noise ordinances, fire exits, and alcohol licensing restrictions led to a gradual dispersal of the party.

But despite the obvious differences, GUAMBO was clearly part of the same tradition established by Byrd and Agnello's earlier concerts. To begin with, the advertisements for all three shows—each of which was scheduled to be held in the same venue, Aerospace Hall on Beverly Blvd—are remarkably similar (compare, especially, figs. 4 and 7). The

<sup>72</sup> The *Free Press* provided an apology and explanation in the 29 July issue. One part of the event was to have attendees add to a "junk sculpture" erected in the parking lot of the venue as a communal artistic experience. The venue received several phone calls suggesting a connection between a "junk sculpture" and mass narcotics use. Furthermore, the owners of the hall, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, were criticized for their involvement with an event seen as an orgy. The *Free Press* later expressed dismay at these developments and in doing so made a further connection between GUAMBO and the earlier concerts: "In any case, these crank calls, stupid and humorless as they were, played their part in the last-minute cancellation of a hall which the Free Press has rented several times before, without problems of any kind, for film evenings, happenings and a concert of Schoenberg's twelve-tone music." "Why Everybody Didn't Guambo," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 30 (29 July 1966): 6.

tone of the Concert Happening review foreshadows Hopkins's account of GUAMBO. The former begins:

Several hundred people showed for the Free Press Concert Happening last Friday night, and those who stayed away and have since heard what happened are now sorry that they were frightened away by the word "concert."<sup>73</sup>

Hopkins describes GUAMBO in remarkably similar terms, hinting at the buzz generated by the event:

GUAMBO is a thing to talk about. Thousands had to be turned away. A lot of police had come in, and that bothered some people. A few things were a little disorganized. But that's okay. GUAMBO was an act of love, and not every act of love is perfect. With practice, Guambo will get better.<sup>74</sup>

Both GUAMBO and the Concert Happening were immediately considered important events, significant not only in terms of their ideological goals but also for the social status they conferred to those who attended. In this sense GUAMBO was very similar to the concerts planned by Agnello and Byrd.

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The summer of 1966 marked a point of transition for the Los Angeles cultural scene, as evidenced by the pages of the *Free Press*. Despite the apparent success of the Concert Happening and the Homage to Arnold Schoenberg, the broader appeal of GUAMBO was more in line with Kunkin's ambitions for the newspaper and community. The cultural torch was being passed to Zappa, much to the chagrin of various art-music composers.<sup>75</sup> This transition did not happen overnight, however, though one final event seems to have cemented the legacy of the Los Angeles Hippodrome. An ambiguous advertisement in the 26 August issue of the *Free Press* announced that "Process a happening" would take place that evening in an office building at the corner of Arlington and Washington Blvd. The ad informed prospective attendees of the one dollar and twenty-five cents admission fee, but offered little other information (fig. 8).

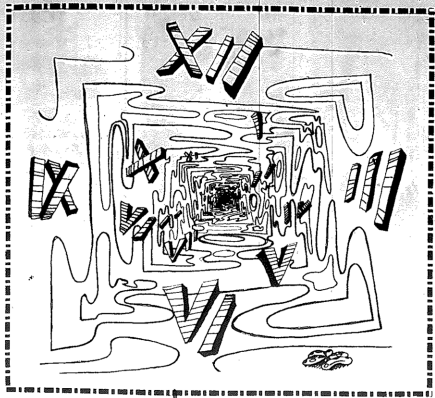
The week after the event had taken place, a headline on the front page of the *Free Press* posed the question: "Process: Psychological Rape?"

<sup>73</sup> "Agnello Stages a Concert Happening Which Really, Really Did Happen," 1.

<sup>74</sup> Hopkins, "GUAMBO Is An Act Of Love," 6.

<sup>75</sup> Byrd continues to harbor resentment toward Zappa, particularly when their work is compared: "I didn't like what he was doing at all—it sounded sloppy and thrown-together to me, and the sentiments were juvenile, potty-mouthed, and simplistic." Beppe Colli, "An Interview with Joseph Byrd," *Clouds and Clocks*, 26 August 2004, [http://www.cloudsandclocks.net/interviews/Byrd\\_interview.html](http://www.cloudsandclocks.net/interviews/Byrd_interview.html)).

FIGURE 8. "Process a happening" advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 34 (26 August 1966): 3



**PROCESS**

**a happening**

UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF  
THE L.A. FREE PRESS AND  
THE EXPERIMENTAL ARTS WORKSHOP  
(OF THE PASADENA ART MUSEUM)

PRESENTED BY  
THE LOS ANGELES HIPPODROME

8PM

FRIDAY AUGUST 26

1853 ARLINGTON (AT WASHINGTON BLVD.)

ONE DOLLAR AND TWENTY FIVE CENTS

A series of articles inside the issue clarified the details for those unable to attend and revealed what a controversial evening it had been. In a brief scenario of the event, Byrd describes Process as

a small slice of life, taken (abstracted, if you like) from the customs of interrogation, the job interview, the induction physical, university registration, credit application, jail, immigration, city hall, ad inf.<sup>76</sup>

The happening—if indeed it may be accurately referred to as such—had the audience (“subjects”) line up in a hot office building and proceed through a series of mundane tasks and personally invasive interviews all while being supervised and judged by a staff of volunteers dressed in uniform white smocks.<sup>77</sup> Only when they had completed each station and collected the requisite stamped forms were participants free to leave. According to Agnello, “Process was a study of stripping all art symbology from an event (a kind of bureaucratic ritual) to see how much aesthetic value remained.”<sup>78</sup> In his own synopsis, Agnello, who remained behind the scenes with his fellow organizers, raved about the event’s success: “I took a peek in one of the big rooms when it was going on. I immediately ran back and with a great deal of pride said, ‘We didn’t create art, we created a reality.’”<sup>79</sup> Recently Byrd recalled the event in similarly enthusiastic terms:

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Process was my last step in performance art. It was carefully planned and superbly executed by volunteers (we had decided that none of the principals should be visible, lest the event be seen as an extension of our personalities, rather than a slow, methodical metaphor for institutional dehumanizing). I thought it an unequivocal success.<sup>80</sup>

Not everyone shared this enthusiasm. A lengthy review by none other than Yates was printed on the page facing Byrd’s and Agnello’s recaps. Yates, who had attended the event with his wife, was shocked that he

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Byrd, “PROCESS,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 35 (2 September 1966): 10.

<sup>77</sup> According to Agnello’s account, labeling the event a happening was a matter of some contention among the organizers: “We didn’t want to use the word ‘Happening’ to describe Process but we’re not crazy. We know that the majority of people (including myself) are programmed to patronize words. If you call an event a concert, you have one kind of audience; if you call it a ‘Freak Out,’ you get another. So with much misgiving, we called PROCESS a Happening in hope that the term would succeed in reaching the greatest majority of interested people, no matter what social background. It did what we hoped.” Michael Agnello, “PROCESS: Happening or Reality,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 35 (2 September 1966): 10.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Byrd, e-mail message to the author, 15 July 2010.

should be expected to cooperate with such a blatantly political demonstration:

I went out of there wondering what in Hades has happened to young radicals. I should have known of course. The same thing has happened before to others. Whoever was in charge of this Process had gone a considerable distance beyond the play-game-ritual atmosphere of a Happening. This thing was indeed a PROCESS, but political.<sup>81</sup>

When he tried to leave prematurely, Yates was strongly discouraged from doing so by the event staff and discovered that he would not be permitted to exit unless he paid a second de-processing fee.<sup>82</sup> Understandably, his review interprets the event as being undeniably sinister, wondering “how the sponsors of this Process would react if the same Happening, same questions, same strong-arm methods had been sponsored by the KKK.”<sup>83</sup> In his own statement, Kunkin—perhaps to clear the newspaper’s liability—sides with Yates and condemns PROCESS in equally harsh terms:

Process was a game concerned not with material reality but with subjective reality—a region which is played with only by brain washers and people who have little experience in the hard task of creating their own personal meanings, their own subjective reality. People who are, in other words, immature and unable to perceive the importance of the hard-won delicacy and costly achievements of personal values. One does not play games lightly in that area of human identity.<sup>84</sup>

Although subsequent letters to the editor show Byrd and Agnello standing by their artistic convictions, the event undoubtedly cast the composers in a negative light.<sup>85</sup> Their relationship with the *Free Press* turned sour, setting the stage for a new cultural ambassador to the underground press.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Yates, “Process: A Critique of a Happening,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 35 (2 September 1966): 11.

<sup>82</sup> According to Kunkin: “Neither the Free Press nor anyone else (except the Experimental Arts Workshop people themselves) knew that coercion was to be used to prevent people from leaving. As it happened severe psychic coercion and moderate physical force were applied to prevent people from dropping out of the process and leaving.” Art Kunkin and Jeanne Morgan, “Are You Out There, Veterans of Process?” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 35 (2 September 1966): 11, 17.

<sup>83</sup> Yates, “Process: A Critique of a Happening,” 11.

<sup>84</sup> Kunkin and Morgan, “Are You Out There, Veterans of Process?” 17. Despite this seemingly negative commentary, Tierra remembers Kunkin’s involvement with a high degree of appreciation: “Art Kunkin really saw himself and his role as one who provided a platform—underground newspaper for supporting all that was new, weird, strange and oddly wonderful. If you talked to him, he had the wisdom to not even try to understand it but only to support ‘it,’ which was some unidentified something that seemed to have its own destiny.” Tierra, e-mail message to the author, 27 January 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Agnello writes: “Two messages so far. One from Joseph Byrd: ‘We promise never to do PROCESS again, and the next thing we do will be esthetically on a level that you can



Meanwhile, Zappa's popularity continued to grow among counterculture radicals, beginning in Los Angeles and radiating outward. A second concert was planned in cooperation with the *Free Press* titled "Freak Out: Son of GUAMBO" on 13 August (fig. 9). As its title suggests, the event was conceived to be in the same vein as GUAMBO, though in this case with greater focus on Zappa and his music. A subsequent review in the *Free Press* described the audience as being less enthusiastic than the GUAMBO crowd, but the event was successful enough to encourage Zappa to organize similar performances.<sup>86</sup>

During this time Zappa began using the *Free Press* as a platform for disseminating his own ideas about music, culture, and politics, many of which were closely aligned with those of Byrd, Agnello, et al.<sup>87</sup> He took out numerous ads in the paper to announce upcoming concerts and increase the band's media coverage. An advertisement for a second Freak Out—visually reminiscent of the Concert Happening ad with its collage aesthetic and variety of typefaces—ran on 2 September (fig. 10). Then, in the 9 September issue, Zappa paid for a multi-page advertising supplement in the middle of the paper. Under the headline "Freak Out! The Official News of the Mothers," the four-page insert was laid out to resemble a newspaper itself, though in a decidedly less traditional format. Included among photo-collages, pithy handwritten comments, and clippings of musical scores was a series of negative reviews taken from other newspapers, lambasting Zappa and his music (fig. 11). "Necessity is the mother of invention, but The Mothers of Invention proved Saturday night that a 'Freak Out' will never be a necessity," quips *Los Angeles Times* writer Stan Bernstein in an article titled "Mothers of Invention Find a Way to Bore Nearly Everyone."<sup>88</sup> An article by the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner's* Bob Levinson asserts that the "Mothers Invent Sounds Worse Than Music."<sup>89</sup> At the top of the page, however, Zappa shrewdly writes that "the clean-cut folks don't like us much," imbuing his image and music with

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appreciate as art and say, "After all, it's only art." From me: 1984 is forthcoming, what are YOU doing about it? Crying?" Agnello, "[letter to the Editor]," 4.

<sup>86</sup> "[untitled Freak Out Review]," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 33 (19 August 1966): 11.

<sup>87</sup> In his biography, *Electric Don Quixote: The Definitive Story of Frank Zappa*, Neil Slaven argues that Zappa's commandeering of the *Free Press* was envisioned as a campaign to bring his ideas to a wider audience. "Unfortunately," Slaven goes on, "the *Free Press* didn't reach a mass audience [. . .]. Even so, large campaigns start with small battles and Frank made extensive use of the paper's pages in later issues, devoting whole sections to mostly negative critical reaction to the band, advertising upcoming gigs and vilifying their detractors." Neil Slaven, *Electric Don Quixote: The Definitive Story of Frank Zappa* (New York: Omnibus Press, 2003), 67.

<sup>88</sup> Stan Bernstein, "Mothers of Invention Find a Way to Bore Nearly Everyone," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 1966, sec. IV.

<sup>89</sup> Bob Levinson, "Mothers Invent Sounds Worse Than Music," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, July 24, 1965, F-5.

FIGURE 9. "Freak Out: Son of GUAMBO" advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 31 (5 August 1966): 8



FIGURE 10. "Freak Out" advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 35 (2 September 1966): 6

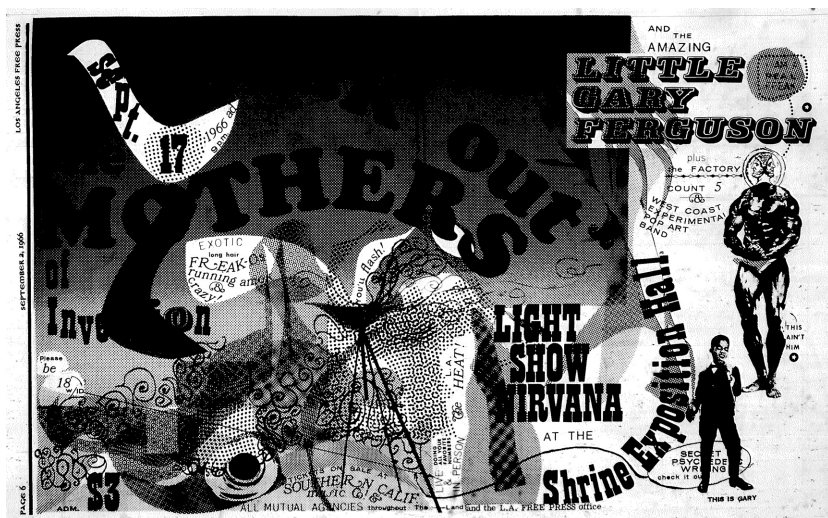


FIGURE 11. "Freak Out! The Official News of the Mothers," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 36 (9 September 1966): 11

LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS

(PAID ADVERTISEMENT)

PAGE 11

THE CLEAN-OUT FOLKS  
DON'T LIKE US MUCH

FRANK ZAPPA  
The Head

**MOTHERS**  
Invent Sounds  
Worse Than Music (HERALD EXAMINER)

**FREAK OUT!**  
SON OF GUAMBO!  
INCREDIBLE LIGHT BEAM  
THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION  
NO ONE DANCE  
SHRINE EXPOSITION HALL

By BOB LEVINSON

They call themselves the Mothers of Invention. Consensus, a term of Group Confucius, has it that this alone will set Necessity back a few years.

The Mothers advocate a form of music currently alien to all except members of the United Nations of Los Angeles, whose congregation is a delatessen on Fairfax Avenue.

"If you think I'm weird, you should see some of them," Frank Zappa advised, interrupting his dissertation on "Freak Out" to conquer another piece of peach pie and sip coffee.

Frank is the Head Mother, the group's leader, musical director, composer, arranger, spokesman, and stylist. He is skinny-tall, an emaciated John Carradine, and wears his hair long. A goatee lurks defiantly under his lower lip.

On this day he was wearing a collarless white shirt, candy-striped pants, and tennis sneakers — no socks. It was a warm day.

The Head Mother does not go unadvised, and people were prone to stare now. He was eating and

osting at a sidewalk table on the Sunset Strip.

"I don't believe pornography exists," Zappa said. "If pornography doesn't exist, how can it be there, in my music?"

He carved out another piece of pie and sneered at this interpretation of the 88:10 minutes of sound that constitutes "Freak Out," the remote Verbe album that also has been classified as vulgar, ridiculous, a dangerous influence, and several unwise things as well.

"Our whole bag is outrage," he explained. "That's it. The only way you can fight for survival is with outrage, because someone is going to outrage you right back."

"Each song in our album is an abstraction of certain trends in pop music. I tried to make it as gross as possible, so that somewhere along the line someone could say, 'That's really gross.'"

Even when it's supposedly serious, the whole thing is a satire. It satirizes all those groups that cut stuff that ones. Its satirizing every puer rock-and-roll group and all that teenage nonsense with oversimplified lyrics, on-wah, falsetto, and mumbling business.

Two longplay records contain a plethora of sounds and styles and titles such as "Hungry Freaks, Daddy," "Who Are the Brain Police?" "Wowie Zowie," "Help, I'm a Rock," and "The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet."

The last runs 14 1/2 minutes and includes one section subtitled "Ritual Dance of the Child Killer." The composition is incomplete, but Verbe needed something for Side 4.

Frank declared.

Inside the album are photographs of the Mothers (Ray Collins, Jim Black, Roy Estrada, and Elliot Ingber), some of the Mother's little helpers and United Nations members, as well as reading matter authored by Zappa, much of it relevant to the music.

One part explains that to "freak out" is to practise free expression in an individual or collective band. The Mothers do it on their records and, infers, the delicatessen delegation on their live bread.

Those who obtain the album may do it by discarding the records and playing the cover.

"This is a rough beginning," the Head Mother said. "Whether or not I believe, I was meant to do it."

Find a Way to Bore Nearly Everyone

By STAN BERNSTEIN

Necessity is the mother of invention, but The Mothers of Invention proved Saturday night that a "Freak Out" will never be a necessity.

P. T. Barnum said there's a sucker born every minute and about 600 wandered into the Shrine Exposition Hall and found boredom. The show lacked direction and there was little or no supervision. What was supposed to be entertaining happened to be monotonous.

The Mothers of Invention is a musical quartet. The only way this can be deduced is from the press release. The decibel count on the sound system was so high that one wondered whether or not an air-raid siren system had gone berserk.

At one point the sound system broke down and there were a few moments of merciful silence. The only barely recognizable song performed was the Beatles' "Hard Day's Night." The arrangement was short and had absolutely no merit.

The music was supposed to provide a backdrop for a light show. Images were projected on four or five screens above the audience. This could have been the most of the evening's entertainment, but those in attendance just didn't want to be disturbed. They were like domestic animals in a corral just moaning and bleating.

The paying customers wanted to be part of the show. In attempting to dress in as outlandish costumes as possible, they all conformed to one style of dress — ridiculous. The most outlandish costume was one guy in a shirt and tie. Ventilation in the large hall was nonexistent. It was obvious that the "hot" routine was either to induce the audience to dance or buy refreshments. It didn't work. Some of the people just sat down on the floor, probably puzzling how they could have spent \$2.50 for the show.

Kettle drums, slide drums, chinos, gongs, xylophones and other instruments were utilized to create the sound. Ray Collins, lead vocalist of The Mothers of Invention, proved without a doubt that it's possible to sing poorly if they play loud enough behind you.

Some of the slides in the light show looked like the color slides from a Roachach test. Certain changes were made to keep pace with the music. Obviously someone went to an awful lot of trouble to put the light show together, but it fell on deaf ears.

After about an hour of having the eardrums punctured beyond repair it was time to light off the annual. A guard warned at the exit that readmittance was not possible. It was the most welcome news of the night.

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IT'S NOT PRETTY, ALSO  
YOU CAN'T DANCE TO IT.

**who are the  
brain  
Police?**

(THAT'S THE NAME OF OUR  
NEXT SINGLE — IT IS  
RADIANTLY MAGNIFICENT)

STOVE BOLT  
Iron Tapped

FIGURE 12. "Freak In" advertisement, *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 40 (7 October 1966): 11

**FREAK-IN**

presented by  
PAT MORGAN

WITH THE SENSATIONAL BOY WONDER FROM DALLAS, TEXAS  
**LITTLE GARY FERGUSON**

Hit Album THE FID ARROWS  
**THE ARROWS**

JUG BAND MUSIC  
**KENNY DINO**

THE INCOMPARABLE  
**DOLORES JOHNSON**

**THE FABULOUS FABS**  
Singing THAT'S THE BAG I'M IN  
(currently climbing on the charts)

THE WORLD-FAMOUS ARTIST AND SCULPTOR  
with his wife, his child and his entire entourage of  
dancers and freakers  
**VITO**

light show nirvana  
and  
optical psych-out

Dance

**Shrine Exposition Hall**  
700 W. 32nd STREET  
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

FOR THE FIRST TIME  
ON THE WEST COAST  
**THE WAY OUT**

WITH THE ECSTATIC SOUNDS OF ETERNITY  
special **DOOR PRIZE**

**SAT. 9 P.M. OCT. 15**

ADMISSION  
**\$3.00**  
AT THE BOX OFFICE

**\$2.50** ADVANCE SALES

AT THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA MUSIC CO. ALL  
MUTUAL AGENCIES AND THE FREE PRESS OFFICE

a sense of authenticity by sarcastically embracing the criticism of the perceived establishment and turning it on its head.<sup>90</sup>

Zappa made a continuous effort to present himself as a *sui generis* cultural iconoclast. Fans quickly subscribed to this irreverent image, whereas other bands and concert promoters recognized its commercial potential and co-opted Zappa's aesthetics for their own use. A number of unrelated announcements in the *Free Press* quite clearly copied the visual style of the Freak Out ads (see, for example, fig. 12, which advertises a "Freak In" on 15 October, also held at the Shrine Exposition Hall). Zappa was immediately critical of such events and sharply reprimanded the event organizers in a subsequent issue of the *Freak Out News*. "The Mothers of Invention are in no way shape or form connected with this ersatz promotion[al] event," he declared, adding, "We repudiate this act of mercenary indiscretion."<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Although no author is attributed to the writing, it does appear to be in Zappa's hand.

<sup>91</sup> Frank Zappa, "Phony Freak Ins, Zeidler Dope Ads, & Karl Franzoni's Letter," *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 41 (14 October 1966): 14.

By this time, however, Zappa had already begun to distance himself from his contemporaries along ideological lines. The 16 September issue of the *Free Press* featured two more full pages of advertising space paid for by Zappa. The first page carried a typical collage-style poster advertising the second Freak Out. The second page had something else entirely. In the middle of an otherwise empty page is a small block of text broken into four paragraphs (fig. 13). The text is signed “Suzy Creamcheese,” a fictional character who appears in several of Zappa’s works as a personification of youthful naiveté in the world of cultural exploitation—and in this case serving as a pseudonym for Zappa himself. Zappa comes to his main point in the second paragraph:

A freak is not a freak if all are freaks. “Freaking Out” should presuppose an active freedom, freedom meaning a liberation from the control of some other person or persons. Unfortunately, reaction seems to have taken [the] place of action. We SHOULD be as satisfied listening to the Mothers perform from a concert stage. If we could channel the energy expended in “Freaking Out” physically into “Freaking Out” intellectually, we might possibly be able to create something concrete out of the ideological twilight of bizarre costumes and being seen being bizarre.<sup>92</sup>

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The text is remarkably similar to the manifestos provided by Agnello, Byrd, and their colleagues accompanying the “Homage to Schoenberg” concert. Fearing that his art had become susceptible to exploitation by the mass media, Zappa borrows a technique from his predecessors: publishing a declaration of his socio-political mission in the *Free Press*. Like Agnello and Byrd, Zappa pursued ambitions of authenticity while flipantly thumbing his nose at the establishment.<sup>93</sup>

### *An Alternative Reading*

In less than three years, the Los Angeles Hippodrome had burst onto and quickly faded from the pages of the *Los Angeles Free Press*. Events like the “Concert Happening,” once front-page news, were by late 1966

<sup>92</sup> Frank Zappa, “[untitled Advertisement],” *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 37 (16 September 1966): 10 (original emphases).

<sup>93</sup> Neil Slaven speculates about Zappa’s intentions: “Whatever the cost of a whole page ad in the *Free Press*, of which this letter formed a small island in the centre, what did Frank expect to achieve? Did he really believe that audiences already required to listen to his music rather than dance to it, would also think about his message and act upon it? There’s no mistaking the earnestness in his sentences or the sententiousness in his call to arms. Not for the first time, he was preaching to deaf and distracted ears.” Slaven, *Electric Don Quixote: The Definitive Story of Frank Zappa*, 75. Given Zappa’s obvious penchant for image building, it seems entirely possible that this too was a calculated marketing ploy. Thumbng his nose at the status quo, in other words, might have been a shrewdly executed way of lending appealing anti-establishment credibility to his music.

FIGURE 13. Manifesto of Frank Zappa (alias Suzy Creamcheese), *Los Angeles Free Press* 3, no. 37 (16 September 1966): 10

PAGE 10

(PAID ADVERTISEMENT)

LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS

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This is about the Mothers of Invention. We have watched them grow, and with their growth, we hopefully have grown. Their honesty has offended some and been provocative to many, but in any case, their performances have had a real effect on their audiences.

The Mothers' music is very new, and as their music is new, so is the intention of their music. As much as the Mothers put into their music, we must bring to it. The Mothers, and what they represent as a group has attracted all of the outcasts, the pariahs, the people who are angry and afraid and contemptuous of the existing social structure. The danger lies in the "Freak Out" becoming an excuse instead of a reason. An excuse implies an end, a reason a beginning. Being that the easiest way is consistently more attractive than the harder way, the essential thing that makes the "Freak Out" audiences different constitutes their sameness. A freak is not a freak if ALL are freaks. "Freaking Out" should presuppose an active freedom, freedom meaning a liberation from the control of some other person or persons. Unfortunately, reaction seems to have taken place of action. We SHOULD be as satisfied listening to the Mothers perform from a concert stage. If we could channel the energy expended in "Freaking Out" physically into "Freaking Out" intellectually, we might possibly be able to create something concrete out of the ideological twilight of bizarre costumes and being seen being bizarre. Do we really listen? And if we really listen, do we really think? Freedom of thought, conversely, brings an awesome responsibility. Looking and acting eccentric IS NOT ENOUGH.

A mad tea-party is valid only as satire, commenting ironically, and ending in its beginning, in that it is only a trick of interpretation. It is not creation, and it IS NOT ENOUGH.

What? WE must try to do then, is not only comment satirically on what's wrong, but try to CHANGE what's wrong. The Mothers are trying.

Suzy Creamcheese

overshadowed by “Freak Outs.” In other words Byrd and Agnello’s passionate rise from what they thought to be the ashes of contemporary music in Los Angeles had ceded to a more aggressive youth culture. This narrative, pieced together from reports in a single newspaper, is tantalizingly straightforward. But newspapers are temporally situated. Even a publication like the *Free Press*, with its occasional manifestos and abdications, promotes chronology as the *a priori* mode of understanding historical events. In this case, despite the apparent torch passing from Yates and the Monday Evening Concerts to Byrd and Agnello and then to Zappa and the Freaks, all three groups co-existed for a number years.

In their writings for the *Free Press*, Byrd and Agnello routinely dismissed the Monday Evening Concerts as a misguided and outdated stronghold of the contemporary music “Establishment.” In doing so they seem largely unaware of the schism that had developed between Yates and his successor, Lawrence Morton. When Yates stepped down as director in 1954, Morton steered the series in a markedly conservative direction by staunchly promoting the music of a select group of modernist composers.<sup>94</sup> Yates, on the other hand, still an active and influential voice in the series, advocated the pursuit of a specific experimental stream led by John Cage and his acolytes.<sup>95</sup> Less than two years after Agnello’s suggestion that an appearance by the ONCE group might kick-start the Monday Evening Concerts, Yates did just that.<sup>96</sup>

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On the other end of experimental music advocates, Zappa repeatedly showed evidence of a conservatism that seems at odds with his carefully honed image of a cultural iconoclast. Many of his compositions include overt references to such modernist titans as Ives and Stravinsky. The track “Soft-Cell Conclusion” on the 1966 album *Absolutely Free* features an

<sup>94</sup> In a 1957 article on the subject, Morton expressed his feelings directly: “The radical composers (Boulez, Stockhausen & Co.) are interesting because they have found new techniques, new methods, new sonorities. Their music must continue to be played until we are able to find out what it says and means. Not until then can we decide whether we value it, let alone like or dislike it. At the present moment I would say that most of us are in a perfect position to make no judgments at all.” Morton, “Music and the Listener (1957),” ix.

<sup>95</sup> See Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof*, 187.

<sup>96</sup> Yates’s enthusiasm for the Once group was not shared by the board of the Monday Evening Concerts. In a letter to his friend, the poet Payton Houston, Yates complained of his colleagues’ closed-mindedness: “You may be interested to learn that, as of now, my slightly middle-aged friends who have until lately thought of themselves as the forward edge of advancing musical discovery, who marched stoutly with me in the name of Bartók, the causes of Ives and Schoenberg, the discovery of Webern, who would not entirely abandon me to Cage, are unanimously furious against me for having arranged the local appearance of my friends Mumma & Ashley from ONCE. Men and composers who believed themselves prepared to fight to the death in the cause of aesthetic freedom and modern music were stalking out in the first 15–25 minutes, enraged, outraged, glaring, uncompromising, just like the fathers, grandfathers & g-g-fathers of musical integrity before ’em.” Yates in *ibid.*, 231.

intentionally Ivesian overlaying of “God Bless America,” “America the Beautiful,” and “The Marines’ Hymn.” Similarly, the lyrics of the mid-1970s song “Titties & Beer” are modeled closely on the plot of Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat*.<sup>97</sup> Along similar lines, Zappa spent a great deal of time, effort, and money on pursuing a career in orchestral art music as both a composer and a conductor.<sup>98</sup> Despite career-spanning declarations in which he marketed himself as an avant-garde revolutionary, his musical tastes and occupational ambitions were stuck in the early decades of the twentieth century.

For their part, Byrd and Agnello collaborated to follow a similarly complex trajectory. After Process, the pair formed a rock group with Dorothy Moskowitz and other members of the New Music Workshop called The United States of America. The group, once more facilitated by financial backing from Kunkin, would not last long.<sup>99</sup> Disagreements with Byrd would lead Agnello to leave the band before the group’s first and only recording, a self-titled LP released in 1968.<sup>100</sup> Later described by Byrd as “an avant-garde political/musical rock group [...] combining: (1) Electronic sound (not ‘electronic music’!) ... (2) Musical/political radicalism ... (3) Performance art,” the short-lived USA was not particularly successful—though they have, over the last few decades, garnered considerable critical acclaim.<sup>101</sup>

Considering the geographic context may help clarify these complications. By the early 1960s Los Angeles was well on its way to becoming the vast and infinitely complex city it is today.<sup>102</sup> The city has, throughout its relatively brief history, experienced continuously large population growth along with an atomization of community centers within a maelstrom of wildly fluctuating industrial, political, and economic influences. These conditions prompted Edward Soja to describe Los Angeles as “the paradigmatic window through which to see the last half of the twentieth

<sup>97</sup> For a more thorough treatment of Zappa’s borrowings from Stravinsky, see Andre Mount, “‘Bridging the Gap’: Frank Zappa and the Confluence of Art and Pop” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2010).

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, the cover photograph of the 1997 compilation, *Strictly Genteel*, in which Zappa is pictured wearing a tuxedo and sprawled out on a pile of his own full-orchestra scores. Frank Zappa, *Strictly Genteel: A “Classical” Introduction to Frank Zappa*, Rykodisc RCD 10578, 1997.

<sup>99</sup> As Moskowitz points out in an e-mail, “Kunkin was very instrumental (pardon the pun) in getting the USA started. He staked the band to its first set of speakers. We had no startup funds of our own.” Falarski, e-mail message to the author, 15 December 2012.

<sup>100</sup> The United States of America, *The United States of America*, Columbia CS 9614, 1968.

<sup>101</sup> Byrd in Richard Kostelanetz and Raeanne Rubenstein, *The Fillmore East: Recollections of Rock Theater* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995).

<sup>102</sup> Michael Dear provides a brief encapsulation of the contributing historical processes in his *The Postmodern Urban Condition*, 101–11.



century.”<sup>103</sup> Although Los Angeles may not exert a direct influence on the entirety of the contemporary global community, the complex networks found within the city’s vast borders provide an enlightening model for understanding all manner of social relationships. The influence of this geo-cultural context on the individuals discussed here, then, must not be underestimated.

The communities in which Yates, Byrd, Agnello, and Zappa lived were crowded and as socially variegated as one can imagine. Avant-garde composers and freak rockers could be found alongside academic intellectuals and political radicals, populating the same apartment buildings, coffee shops, and street protests. Inevitably, meetings in physical space—and virtual space if one considers their proximity in the pages of the *Free Press*—resulted in the cross-pollination of ideas.<sup>104</sup> In this sense, Yates, Byrd, Agnello, and Zappa, as well as everyone around them, were both part and product of their surroundings. Their work, then, might be best understood as drawing from a communal pool of ideas, idioms, and techniques. Despite playing on different instruments and for different audiences, Byrd and Agnello’s work as The United States of America does not fall far from the *Free Press* concerts in terms of its avant-garde inclinations. Likewise, the “Homage to Schoenberg” discussed at the beginning of this essay could have just as viably been performed on amplified electric guitars in a rock club.

Though physically crowded, often living in close quarters with individuals from a wide range of social strata, all the individuals discussed here moved fluidly between a number of different cultural, aesthetic, and political spaces. Considering the entirety of their output, one finds idioms drawn from high modernist art music, rock, and avant-garde performance art. In concert, they carried themselves both as serious performers in the grand Western tradition and as costumed freaks, playing to blue- and long-haired audiences alike. Their work was charged, often politically, by instincts to both preserve and deconstruct various traditions. To associate any one individual or performance with a singular aesthetic stream would be misleading. Rather, each project, each performance and statement might be thought of as a unique configuration of ideas and execution.

Each of these perspectives—the historical chronology seen through subsequent issues of the *Free Press* and the intermingling of various types of social space—provides a suitable explanation for the motivations of

<sup>103</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 221.

<sup>104</sup> David McBride provides a particularly compelling example in his “Death City Radicals: The Counterculture in Los Angeles,” in *The New Left Revisited*, ed. Paul Buhle and John Campbell McMillian (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003).

the Los Angeles Hippodrome. But neither presents the whole picture. On its own, the former explanation obscures the interconnectedness of social networks whereas the latter fails to address the historical shifts that did in fact occur. Considered in tandem, however, they reveal a unique moment in which aesthetic change played out in both the historical narratives and overlapping spaces of 1960s Los Angeles.

### ABSTRACT

In the 17 June 1966 issue of the *Los Angeles Free Press*, members of a group calling themselves the Los Angeles Hippodrome advertised an upcoming event: an “Homage to Arnold Schoenberg.” The ad seems to suggest nothing out of the ordinary: a recital of the composer’s complete piano works along with a slideshow of his visual art and the playing of a recorded lecture. The facing page, however, paints a very different picture. There, the *Free Press* reproduced a series of manifestos written by the event’s organizers. The manifestos range in content from lengthy ruminations on the death of art to a cartoon of a dog-like creature brandishing a knife and poised to cut off the head of a snake above the words “GRASP THE WEAPON of CULTURE!” With their absurdist humor and heady, abstract proselytizing, these statements stand in marked contrast to the refined poise of the music of the Second Viennese School.

To address this incongruity, one must look beyond the Los Angeles Hippodrome to several other closely related communities. Dorothy Crawford (1995) provides an invaluable account of one such group in Los Angeles, focusing primarily on a circle of modernist music enthusiasts who organized and attended the Monday Evening Concerts series. But the individuals behind the “Homage to Schoenberg” were in equally close contact with participants in the Freak Movement, a Los Angeles manifestation of the 1960s counterculture led by iconoclastic rock guitarist Frank Zappa. Despite superficial differences, the political affinities and geographic proximity of these groups facilitated a free transmission of values and ideas that blurred the boundaries between them.

Keywords: counterculture, Los Angeles, *Los Angeles Free Press*, modernism, underground press, Frank Zappa