

Sypher Work 5: Solar/Lunar Music
Percussion Quartet
Telecommunication I
Rough Cut

Lindsay Vickery
Paul Sealey
Cathie Travers
Stephen Benfall

INTERVAL

Pleiades

Iannis Xenakis

the works ...

CYPHER WORK 5: SOLAR/LUNAR MUSIC

for Percussion Quartet

Solar/Lunar Music, as its title suggests is comprised of two types of music, representing not opposites, but different orientations or planes. For example, Stillness/Motion; Dream/Wakefulness; even Female/Male. The two planes inhabit different, but not mutually exclusive sound worlds: the upper plane tending to be dynamic and assertive is played on conventional unamplified percussion instruments; and the lower plane is characterised by a more static and mysterious music played on a range of artificially altered instruments (octave displaced-reverbed timpani and watergong; ring modulated windchimes, and synthesized and sampled sounds).

Solar/Lunar Music is the last of my five *Cypher* works in which the same nine digit numerical pattern is used as the basis for the organisation of its structure from the most micro-rhythmic structures to the overall formal shape. The pattern, like a strand of DNA, determines the general characteristics of the music leaving its fingerprints in every corner. Yet the more closely it is examined the more rich variety can be found in the way the shape is expressed.

In this way the form of the lower plane is the same as that of the upper plane in reverse, and the form of each determines the way in which they interact. To continue the analogy: spiralling around each other like the coils of a DNA molecule.

Solar/Lunar Music was commissioned by Nova Ensemble with assistance from the Western Australian Department for the Arts.

Lindsay Vickery

Compositions let down percussionists

CONCERT

NOVA ENSEMBLE
Directed by David Pye
WA Academy of Performing Arts
Reviewed by STUART HILLE

THE percussion family has undergone the most radical change and development over the past 50 years. Its range of resources, comprising everything from the most traditional to the most exotic, has created a vast array of tone colours.

Over the same period there has been a tendency towards much greater rhythmic complexity. While it falls on the percussionist's shoulders to keep up with this growth and demand for technical expertise, it is the composer's responsibility to negotiate all these new sounds in a meaningful and cogent manner.

There is no denying the Nova Ensemble's percussion-based concert on Sunday night was presented with command, rapport and sensitivity — qualities that have earned them a significant national reputation. But it must be said that most of the music had severe shortcomings.

One of the Ensemble's principal objectives is to commission works by WA composers. On this occasion we had four world premieres from locals and a national premiere of the percussion sextet *Pleiades* by the Greek composer Iannis Xenakis.

For the most part, the music seemed unable to establish striking and convincing discourse, to be concerned far more with toying with a colour gamut and relying on gesture than with interrelating them.

Because none of the pieces was familiar to me all I can convey are first impressions. Notwithstanding, in *Cypher Work 5: Solar/Lunar Music* by Lindsay Vickery and *Percussion Quartet* by Paul Sealey I was constantly searching for some sense of direction.

The former certainly embodied some interesting concepts but musically I became more concerned with the lack of sonic shape, the inability to sustain climaxes and the apparent token electronics than with human fundamentals. Sealey's piece, I felt, was an unsuccessful attempt to grapple with the medium.

Telecommunication I by Cathie Travers was more interesting. At least she stayed with her initial idea consistently. But again there is a need to break loose and explore new territory. She has a distinctive voice but she needs to channel it in other directions.

Stephen Benfall's *Rough Cut* was very persuasive, though the more frenetic sections came across with less conviction than the opening and concluding frames.

The concert concluded with the Xenakis work. Despite an excellent performance by the Nova Ensemble, I felt that the music was not only tame but derivative. There were some inspiring moments, but the colour, density and complexity of rhythm we normally associate with this composer gave way, for some reason,



Cathie Travers: needs to break loose.