

new york

Barbara Chung, Elliot Sharp, Yong Soon Min

Irrational Fullness

Irrational Fullness was a bouquet to the universe created collaboratively by dancer/choreographer Barbara Chung, composer/instrumentalist Elliot Sharp and painter Yong Soon Min. Using the ancient Chinese model of the synergistically related five elements of the universe—wood, water, fire, earth and metal—the artists designed their work as a cycle. Dancers and musicians improvised their performances of the elements, starting at a different point in the cycle each night.

Chung conceptualized the work as an expression of compassion and joy—"for one another and for the world in which we live." *Irrational fullness*, she said, suggests the harmonious balancing of opposites, a primal global need of the '90s. Programs contained a series of phrases that related to each element—"concentrated intensity" (fire), "fluency" (water), "organic listening" (wood)—and were intended to inspire viewers to provide their own interpretations.

Yong Soon Min set the stage with a backdrop of five hinged panels shaped like an orange peel map of the world. Images that described each of the five elements were overlaid sequentially on the panels. The images combined negative with positive aspects of the elements, sending an underlying message of violence about the earth. The metal panel was dominated by a jagged aluminum shape and contained a menacing sci-fi figure. The earth panel contained a camouflage pattern, referring both to blending with nature and to wars fought in tropical jungles. Water was symbolized by "a tear from the sky" (a mirrored tear drop in an eye set in the sky). Although visually interesting, the panels lost impact by being too small for the space. Their negative messages, in addition, did not mesh with the celebratory nature of the music and dancing.

The most successful merging of visual and dance was achieved by Barbara Chung in her opening solo, when she improvised movements over Yong Soon Min's slides of natural and sociopolitical concerns for the earth that were projected on the floor beneath her feet. Images of clouds, people parachuting from the sky and celebrations on the Berlin Wall inspired Chung to create slow, sinuous and poetic gestures that were hypnotic and

sensual. Although the slides were difficult to see, the piece worked in a stream of consciousness way that gave a feeling of completeness and possibilities.

The strongest component of the collaboration was the improvisational music led by Elliot Sharp. Drummer Samm Bennett's performance was a dance of its own as he moved in a rhythmic and visceral way to African shakers, cowbells and bicycle horns played with his feet as well as the standard drum set. Ned Rothenberg played shakuhachi (a Japanese flute) and alto saxophone, and Jin hi Kim played the Komungo (a Korean struck zither). Sharp alternated between a soprano saxophone and a double-necked electric guitar/base, providing the melodic line that held all the other perfor-

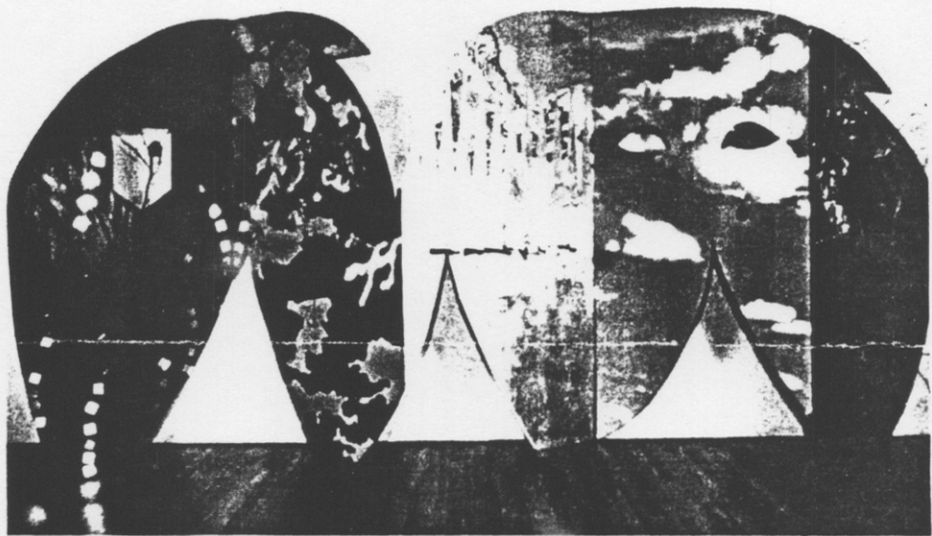
mances together. This small group created unusual tonal, harmonic and textural effects that evoked a variety of moods, and gave listeners exciting new experiences in sound.

The overall effect of the evening was joyful, a harbinger of the new "earth consciousness" that emerged with Earth Day and is becoming the issue of the '90s. A final slide of the earth and footprints reminded us that we must walk lightly upon the incredible gift of nature that has been given to us.

—Phyllis Rosser

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Phyllis Rosser is a sculptor and feminist art critic living in New York City. Her work regularly appears in *New Directions for Women*.



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