

BOSTON GLOBE
OCTOBER 18, 1980

BU's Alea III awaits another throw of the dice

ALEA III — The contemporary music ensemble in its first concert of the season, in works by Mario Davidovsky, Francis Thorne, John Harbison, Geoffrey Wright, and Darius Milhaud, with Theodore Antoniou, music director, conducting, Saturday night at Boston University Concert Hall.

By Richard Buell
Globe Correspondent

Alea III is a Boston University-based performing group whose efforts on behalf of contemporary music have been characterized by a pleasant aura of catholicity and explorativeness in programming and by a sound, trustworthy level of execution in the performances. "Alea" means dice (hence "aleatory"), and it may be something about chance, randomness, odd combinations, pot luck, or serendipity that has had this reviewer curious about what Alea III will be up to. And what did we find Saturday night?

Five pieces were on the program, of which four were by living composers. Two employed tape; two had soprano soloists; two were acquainted with jazz — a pattern here? There was no sense of pattern felt, at any rate, for the concert (untypically, we hope) came to something of an unsatisfying jumble and seemed longer than it actually was. To wit . . .

The Davidovsky "Synchronisms No. 8" for

woodwind quintet and tape had a spikey immediacy to it, was deftly played, and got itself followed by Francis Thorne's third-streamish "Six Set-Pieces," in which the compositional ideals of balance and sequentialness were under attack by a brace of low-pitched instruments bent on shaking that thing, scandalizing the prim and suchlike, percussion instruments attached and jangling. John Harbison's "Samuel Chapter," a setting for soprano and instrumental quintet of a Biblical text, unrolled its narrative calmly, tastefully, at times indecipherably (the instruments loud), and with no great urgency about much of anything. In this Elizabeth Van Ingen was the monochromatic soloist. Geoffrey Wright's "Nocturne III" had soprano Carol Kennedy endeavoring to match her tones — and her enunciation of a spacey-sensitive text by the French poet Robert Desnos — to sinuous computer-generated sounds aimed slightly above or below concert pitch. The effect was of a highly determined slightness.

The benefit of the doubt — this was new music, after all, it simply would all of it not be in the performers' blood, it might not be displayed this time to best advantage — this had us keeping our peace, but the rendition of Darius Milhaud's quaint and rickety evocation of jazz, "La Creation du Monde," set the adrenalin going — it was impossibly plodding, charmless, loud, and lacking in humor! Could these players know so little of slyness and vulgarity and bumps-a-daisy? It would be caddish to go on. The unpropitious may well have been concentrated all in this concert, and Theodore Antoniou's brave group will no doubt benefit from a luckier throw of the dice the next time (Jan. 29) around. Why not?