

# Meltdown Is Hot Stuff At YWCA

BY EVE BERLINER

In an eclectic blend of the improbable and the divine, Memorial Hall of the YWCA, Third Avenue, Brooklyn, became the unlikely outpost for the experimental vanguard with Friday night's performance by Meltdown Performing Arts.

Led by composers Rick Russo and Bob Goldberg, the group provided an imaginative (if incoherent), spirited and faintly amusing aside to the experimental wasteland where anything goes in the name of "art."

The performers do not take themselves seriously.

Amid an audience consisting of rather forlorn patrons of the arts — the residents of the Y — and a group of young, provocative artistic spirits, Meltdown received

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a warm hearing among both skeptics and open minds.

Characterizing themselves as anarchistic and iconoclastic, Meltdown creates a sound stage of mild cacophonous crinkling aluminum foil in duet with amplified microphone jiggling in a kosher pickle jar. It is a kind of anti-music.

Pieces are entitled "Music for Nailboards," "Music for Subways," "Chinese Junk," "Music Larvae" and "Stealing Tactics." On stage, the visage of Pope Pius XII overhangs the spectacle. Besides him, a battered piece of the cityscape — an old bus stop.

Russo, a long-haired theatrical presence in red sequined cap, black cape, white rimmed sunglasses to be replaced by red-rimmed sunglasses and finally, in a simultaneous statement of the absurd, he wears both at the same time; Goldberg, sandy haired in rimless spectacles, a serious experimental music type, is dressed in shades of grey.

Most successful were the works entitled "Balcony Music 1 and 2" which propitiously utilized the theatre-in-the-round (in this case square) format of Memorial Hall with

its high, stately balconies encircling the room. Composer Goldberg sets his two trumpet players, Steven Bernstein and Frank London, and alto sax man, David Hollander, high above the audience with their beatific random horn blasts, movements and duels with Goldberg's electric piano.

It is an evening of tinkling sounds, rubber bands snapping at snare drums, plastic implements scraping nailboards, the meditative intoning of Bronwyn Rucker and philosophic commentary by Russo. (Russo is later seen blowing bubbles.)

Were those high frequency sounds of feedback and distortion periodically emanating from the speakers to be deemed a part of the musical menu? (A painful look on the face of Goldberg's parents. His mother is seen with hands over ears.)

"We try to be demonstrative of daily life in terms of sounds," says Russo. "We're providing things to see and hear. It is our goal if we attain a sort of fluent perception of what is around us. I see many people covering their ears as the subways go by. So it is not unusual," says Russo.

"Covering your ears alters the sound by a process called 'filtration'" reads the program notes. "Covering the ears partially (e.g., opening and closing you hands over them) changes the sound in different ways. Please feel free to experiment in this process during the concert."

"We set into motion a series of processes," says Russo. "We are not looking for results. We are looking to continue our research with new experiments."

"And we have fun with noise," adds Goldberg. "A lot of fun."

The concert was made possible through the cooperation of Meltdown Performing Arts, of which Russo and Rucker are artistic directors, the Brooklyn Academy of Noise, of which Goldberg is the founder, and Monster in the Closet, and through grants from Meet the Composer, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts, among others.

Meltdown can be found headquartered in a onetime 1930's penny arcade museum and performing arts space along the boardwalk of Coney Island where their nuclear cloud stretches over the ensuing seascape.