

An astonishing artist and amplified success

By
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Tuesday's Intermedia concert by the Al Neil Trio at the Vancouver Art Gallery drew an audience in excess of 500. It was a shattering experience at times, a 21-gun assault on the ear which left me reeling. All the same I wouldn't have missed it for all the tea in China.

Neil is an astonishing artist who blends tradition and improvisational spontaneity (which is the heart beat of all art), with all the magic of 20th century technology.

He perceives artistic value in the most utilitarian sounds, and he is ably abetted by his colleagues Richard Anstey, bass player, and Gregg Simpson, drummer.

Actually the muted and

bowed effects of Anstey and Simpson's uncommon mastery of complex rhythms, all serve to highlight the work of maestro Neil whose music is sometimes frustrating to listen to because it has few motifs to grasp and remember, and the very rhythmic complexity of the stuff cancels out any feeling of movement.

One way of listening to Neil's music is not to listen to it but rather allow one's self to sink or swim in the ocean of his variegated invention.

If one does concentrate, however, it soon becomes clear there is a certain counterpoint to his music.

True, it is not the sort of counterpoint one learns from books, but rather a sort of emotional intensity provided

by one player which runs counter to a rhythmic intensity generated by the other players.

How the members of the trio manage to get their melodic and rhythmic explorations to fuse together is a secret known only to members of the group, but they do.

My only disappointment about this very exhilarating concert relates to the degree of amplification which sometimes caused the sound to exceed the cubic capacity of the Art Gallery auditorium, and Neil's seeming reluctance to exploit silence as an integral part of his musical textures.