

"I think of certain things I do as coming out of a marginal field," he said that September afternoon, returning to the subject of his corner on the coast. "Often times I'm simply not interested in playing something which is sounding from a bebop tradition, or I'm more interested in exploring certain rhythmic paths, angular paths, or in considering aspects of musical form *while* I'm improvising.

"Sometimes when I'm doing that, the commercial potential meter drops way down. And that's fine. From my perspective, if I direct my attention towards trying to please everybody — trying to reach the lowest common denominator — the music is going to suffer, because you're not really focused on how deep you want the musical experience to be, or on how much of yourself you want to put into the music..."

Not for the last time, he turned to a familiar point of reference. "I remember Cecil [Taylor] saying, about 12 years ago when there was a lot of talk about communicating with the audience, that the artist's first commitment is to communicate with himself."

The New Orchestra Workshop banner flew over nine Vancouver bands in 1987; the Vancouver Art Trio, Lunar Adventures, the Jazzoids, Hugh Fraser's Quintet and his Vancouver Ensemble of Jazz Improvisation, the Coast Quartet, Chief Feature and the Paul Plimley trio and octet — indeed over virtually all of the west coast's free spirits save perhaps the freest of all, pianist Al Neil, whose infrequent performances through the mid-1980s — his early sixties — have nevertheless been fondly embraced and, in some cases, assisted by the younger N.O.W. musicians.

The workshop itself is in the hands of Gregg Simpson and Paul Plimley — both founding members from 1977 — as well as Clyde Reed, guitarist Ron Samworth and saxophonists Coat Cook and Bruce Freedman. Between them, the six musicians form three of the N.O.W. ensembles — the Plimley and Vancouver Art trios and the Lunar Adventures quartet. Simpson in particular is a pivotal figure: in his teens a sideman to Al Neil and, like Neil, a visual artist, he brings a strong sense of local history and tradition to the workshop's activities; for all that,