

## Music

Schizoid  
world of  
unreal  
sounds

Ariel New Music  
Melba Hall  
Melbourne University

HARVEY MITCHELL

ARIEL New Music continues to show that it is a force to be reckoned with. Under its artistic director Douglas Knehans it provides concerts of contemporary music which are among the most stimulating of their kind in Melbourne.

A program of works by Gerhard, Rorem, Horowitz, Stockhausen and Knehans himself was based largely on several visions of unreality and the conceptual world of the schizophrenic. Certainly, if one is to dabble in unreality, one can hardly do better than to use some of the modern devices available, tape delay, for example, as in Stockhausen's *Solo for Melodic Instrument and Feedback*.

This was apparently receiving its world premier in a version for saxophone and it was given a remarkably efficient performance by Graeme Shilton. Shilton projected something of the state of mind of an Archie Rice, unable to dislodge the saxophone from his mouth, and determined to go on entertaining all the same, even in a nightmare, and even before an audience of ghosts.

Mirror images produced by the electronic technique splintered and careered off into the void, to the sound of obsessive repeated notes and demented screams.

A world of even more violently clashing images is that of the poet Sylvia Plath, who finally committed suicide after several unsuccessful attempts. One can easily see, reading her verse, that the weight of two worlds was bound to crush her eventually. She seemed unable to make the "normal" assumptions about the division between the self and the non-self, so that the workings of reality became a matter for personal guilt.

What sort of music can possibly be appropriate for the poems? The concert provided alternatives - settings of five of the poems by Ned Rorem, and also by Douglas Knehans himself. Rorem's writing is spare, discreet - intent, it seems, on allowing the work to speak for itself.

Knehans makes more of an attempt to match the qualities of the poetry, its lurid colours, its occasional touch of self-mockery, and its ultimate desolation. I was particularly impressed with Knehans' setting of the poem called *You're*. His music is brilliantly catchy and eerily bright, providing an extra dimension to Plath's heavily condensed imagery.

The soloist in both sets of songs was the excellent soprano Meryl Qualfe whose strong technique, insight and restraint make her a major asset in the performance of contemporary music. Knehans is just as fortunate in his choice of instrumentalists: the group playing in this difficult program under conductor Mark Summerbell was virtually without a blemish.