Three Sides of

Performance art is a fairly vague term. It encompasses all types of performing arts, from Eric Bogosian’s comedy to Pooh Kaye’s dance events to Glenn Branca’s wall-of-guitar sound. While mostly a New York phenomenon, it’s coming to your town (witness the recent Kitchen tour). There’s simply too much that fits under the perf-art umbrella to fit into one article; however, a few small glimpses should be sufficient to whet one’s appetite.

Alive is a magazine devoted to chronicling all aspects of perf-art. The premiere issue features interviews with Jim Fouratt (ex-head honcho of NYC’s Danceteria) and Steve Mass (Mudd Club). In addition, there’re articles grouped by specialty. Alive includes pieces on Nam June Paik (video god), the Judson Dance Theatre and the NoiseFest hardcore festival. The writing is professional and relatively unbiased, which is highly unusual in arts periodicals. The only real drag is the price ($3), but if you want to keep on top of the latest, accept no substitutes.

One of the artists showcased in Alive is Laurie Anderson, whose album, Big Science, is a little gem. Anderson’s music is pretty minimalist, relying on keyboards and random novelties (e.g. bagpipes on “Sweaters”) to give her lyric poetry pleasant surroundings. What makes this release such a pleasure is a combination of the simplicity of the arrangements and Anderson’s knack at phrasing.

Lyrics are everything on this disc, music being merely a vehicle for expressing Anderson’s ideas. For example, “Let X=X/It Tango” is an essay on taking things at face value instead of trying to interpret and derive hidden meaning from everything. Perhaps the first line says it best: I met this guy And he looked like he might have been a hat-check clerk at an ice rink Which, in fact, he turned out to be And I said “Oh boy, right again” Here, as in “O Superman (for Massenet),” Anderson uses a vocoder to mechanize her voice. It would appear that this prop is used to point out the automating of our lives, both physically and socially-induced. It is used sparingly, and to good effect.

There are some thorns among the roses, unfortunately. Some effects take a good deal of patience; for example, the aforementioned bagpipes. I still can’t get used to the screeching vocals on “Example #22.” This tune’s interspersing of German phrases within the song is distracting, at best. Still, on balance, this album is superb, although quite out of the ordinary.

Anderson will be in town at a special performance for Center Screen’s 10th anniversary on Saturday, March 12.

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