

The Appointed Cloud

Yoshi Wada

An Interactive Sound Installation

Looking at audio artist Yoshi Wada's sound installation, "The Appointed Cloud", with its variety of 80 organ pipes, giant hanging sheet metal strip, sirens and steam pipe gong, one begins to wonder: How does this thing work?

"The Appointed Cloud" is hardly a traditional pipe organ. It does use a series of pipes sounded by compressed air and it is capable of producing a wide range of musical effects, but most importantly "The Appointed Cloud" is an experiment in sound.

If the soul of the work belongs to Yoshi Wada, then the "muscle" belongs to a small personal computer. Wada has created the piece using a computer program developed by electronics expert David Rayna which automates the installation. This program controls everything from the flow of air to the pipes, to the thunderous vibrations of the huge 20-foot long metal strip hanging from the ceiling, to a mallet striking the hanging steam pipe gong.

The Great Hall, with its 80-foot ceiling and undulating walls embedded with cobalt blue stained glass, unseen by the general public for over a decade, provides an impressive showplace for Wada's latest work. Wada designed his sound installation specifically for the acoustics of the Great Hall. His creation explores the effects of low, rumbling bass sounds and the higher, ringing tones of the organ as they reverberate off the curving walls of the space. Many of the pipes used, which range in size from 11 feet to 6 inches, were donated to Wada and came originally from old church organs in West Germany and the United States. The work continues Wada's fascination with producing sub-sonic sounds — frequencies so low that it seems the sounds are produced by the inner ear rather than an outside source. The unusual space shapes the sound so that visitors will experience changes in tone as they walk around the installation.

Visitors can actively change the composition directly by pushing buttons on a separate keypad. The buttons alter the computer program and produce random variations on the theme. "The Appointed Cloud" is programmed to play in continuous one-hour cycles. As with most items in the Hall of Science, the visitor is invited to interact with "The Appointed Cloud".