

Classical composer charges music with electronics

By Charlie Krig

Classical composer may be a misnomer for Donald Erb. Perhaps a better classification would be a half-classical composer, but that is misleading, too.

The Donald Erb concept of music is to combine taped electronic music with a live symphony orchestra performance. That's why his title is confusing and complex.

Do you typify the man by the standard, traditional music he composes for the orchestra or by the avant-garde electronic sounds that make up the taped score?

It doesn't matter to Erb. He says his influential musical roots go back to the beginning of music in Greece. However, his personal favorites have been jazz, blues, classical choral and Mozart, who Erb calls the greatest composer of all time.

"I've been influenced mainly from the places where I've spent my life, from the bars and Sunday school," Erb said during an appearance Tuesday in Westbrook Music Building.

Erb is in Nebraska because the Omaha Symphony will perform some of his compositions during a concert Thursday night. Erb won't be a guest conductor (which he often does during his frequent nationwide tours) but came as a production consultant. Erb spoke to the UNL Arts Today class.

He explained that his musical interests began in his grade school years in Overland, Kan. His aunt was the elementary school teacher, and one of her courses was music.

But she had a special teaching method, Erb said. Most

other teachers were content to have classroom sing-alongs once a week.

But Erb's aunt wanted students to read music, so she loaded a van with old, usable, instruments. The van was hitched behind her 1953 Chevy and wherever she taught, the children played music and sang.

The resultant concerts were not perfectly polished, Erb said, but there always was a packed house to hear them play.

The problem today, according to Erb, is that people are interested in popular music and have little knowledge of classical works. Erb said his compositions have elements from all styles he has tried; "funky band" in his hometown church, popular music in his junior high school days and country-western in his appearances in bars following a year in the Navy.

"A lot of what happens in popular music in this country has backwash from classical music," Erb said. "The U.S. has more of a mixture of music, but it has more classifications for music, too. Maybe we can get rid of the classifications later because music isn't just one type."

"My idea is to mix the electronic tape and the orchestra so that they blend and don't sound like opposites. For this you have to think. You can't sit there, stoned, and let the music wash over you."

Electronic music already is here, Erb said, and many people do not know it. Much music for commercials or television shows is electronic because it only takes one person to do an entire score. The person re-records synthesizer parts, he said, and the cost of that one

person is less than that for an orchestra.

"Most people don't think of electronic music as being very old," he said. "It was first developed in the late 1890s, but most people think it's been a recent development in the last 20 years."

Electronic music already has gone through three cycles of popularity and indifference, he said.

What classical music needs today is more interest and financial backing, Erb said. It costs more than \$300 a minute to work with a full orchestra, he said.

"The symphonic recording business is dying—dying from economics, dying from the unions' restrictions," Erb said.

But if musicians like their music and if the music-loving public is willing to support orchestras, the symphony orchestra once again can be an influential music source in concerts and recordings, he said.

Ogallala theater auditions Saturday

Warm up your voice and dust off your dancing shoes. Auditions for summer productions at the Front Street "Crystal Palace Revue" in Ogallala will be Saturday from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. in the Arena Theatre on third floor of UNL's Temple Building.

Phil Ruhlman, a UNL student, is a former member of the show and will direct the summer production.

"The show consists of kind of a cabaret, song-and-dance routine format," Ruhlman said. "We need performers who are able to work with people. A big part of the show is to get the audience going so that they have fun, too."

Auditioners should prepare two songs of contrasting

styles, Ruhlman said. People with other special talents such as guitar players and comedians also may try out. Auditioners will be asked to perform a short dance arrangement at try-outs, Ruhlman said.

Rehearsals will begin in Ogallala the week before Memorial Day, and the show will run seven days a week until Aug. 20. Conflicts with school schedules can be worked out, he said.

The show runs only at night, so the performers' days will be free. Ruhlman said other jobs are available during the day for those who want to earn extra money.

Anyone with questions about auditions or the show may call Ruhlman at 435-5003.

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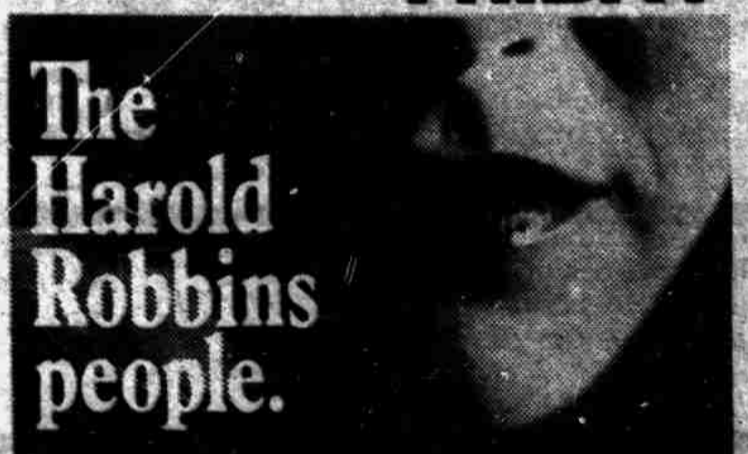
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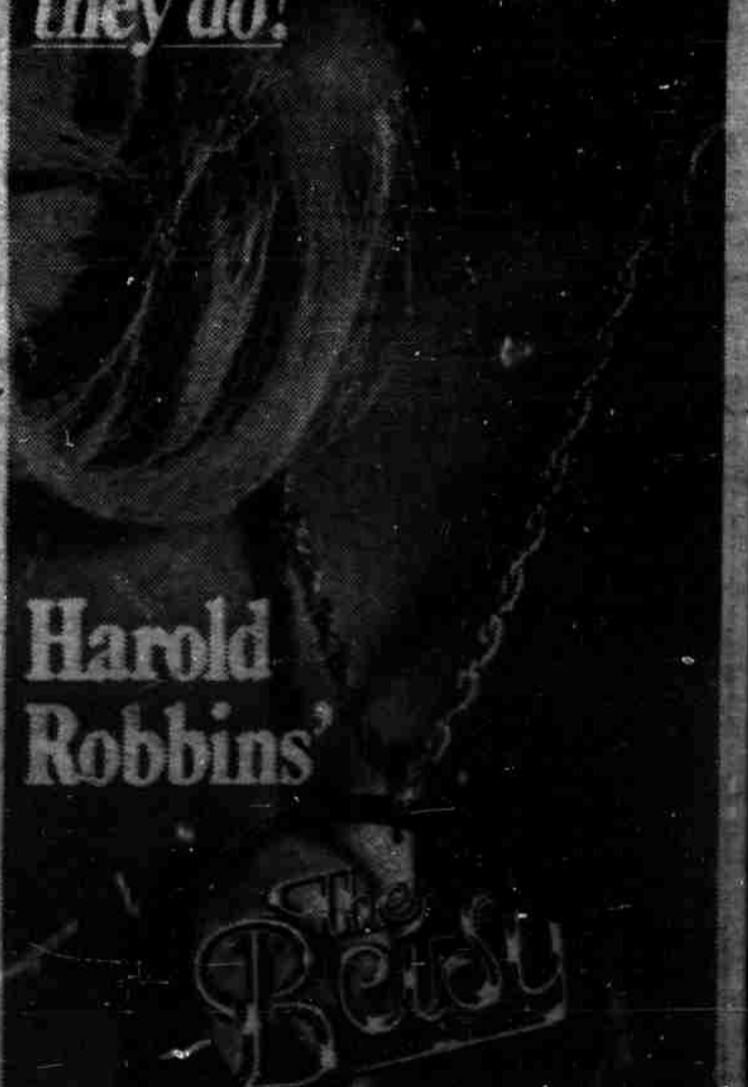
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