

# Just a Headline

By Kyle Gann

## Experimental Intermedia Festival

"Nothing to listen to, just a review": that's what I should call this article in hallowed Phill Niblock style. Niblock's "A Festival With No Fancy Name" at Experimental Intermedia was a solid, exhausting, two-week program of people we hadn't heard from in a long time and people we had never heard from at any length. I'll have more to say about the festival (which concluded March 24) in future columns, but here are the first week's highlights:

March 10: I'd heard Neil Rolnick's pieces before except for *Macedonian Air Drum*, in which he played digitally wired rhythm sticks in the air. The right stick triggered one rhythmic pattern, the left another, and every flick of Rolnick's wrist ushered in a new layer of timbres. He's a showman.

But what blew me away was a film by Barbara Hammer, consisting entirely of moving X rays. Skinless skeletons danced and applied lipstick, and when they drank milk, you saw it splash a quick, straight line down the esophagus. The film was called *Sanctus*, and Rolnick's accompanying score was, very tastefully, a collage of bits sampled from Sanctus mass movements by composers from Machaut to Verdi. The repetition of choral soundbites sanctified Hammer's skeletons, inspiring reverence rather than squeamishness as you saw, as T. S. Eliot put it, "the skull beneath the skin; and breastless creatures underground/leaned backward with a lipless grin." The Zen temple I once attended had a skull on a table with the motto,

"As I am, so shall you be." *Sanctus* drove the point home.