

Masterworks' premiere turns flesh to music

BY WILLA J. CONRAD

BLADE MUSIC CRITIC

When talking of dance and dancers, it's often difficult to resist using musical terms to describe what we see. We talk of the dancers' phrasing, of their musicality, of the way they move in perfect harmony across the floor. One of the highest compliments that can be given to dancers is that they create a visual symphony, their motions as moving as a delicate poem or song.

This Sunday at Epworth United Methodist Church, dancer Celesta Haraszti will literally make music with her motions. She will be performing in a new interactive video work composed by Burton Beerman, Bowling Green State University faculty member, and accompanied by the Masterworks Chorale under the direction of Terry Eder.

Bearing the evocative title "Womin," the half-hour work requires Haraszti to dance in front of a video camera that projects her image onto a large screen behind her. The camera is linked to a computer that triggers another projector to display several previously recorded photos of herself, called icons, onto the screen next to and around her own moving image. In addition, prerecorded synthesized music is heard when some of the icons are triggered.

HARASZTI ACTIVATES the various icons by passing an arm or leg in front of the video camera in a particular place or with a specific pattern. She literally controls the length of time each image is seen and each phrase of music is heard with her motions. Her interactive dance with the computerized video camera is accompanied by live music sung by the choir and played on electronic keyboard by Beerman.

"It's a controlled environment that takes very much talent to make it seem like it's magic," Haraszti says. "Since some of the icons repeat, it could become boring, so I have to be aware of the music, the images, and where my body is in relationship to them."

"Like any good dancer, Celesta has memorized the score and knows how her



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Celesta Haraszti and Burton Beerman

movements relate to the music," says Beerman, who performs 40 electronic music/dance concerts a year with Haraszti. "She knows that when she hits an icon, she has to move and be beautiful, to hold and milk that icon for a musical phrase."

THIS PERFORMING process, which could be partly described as real-time

interactive video, is a new development in the computer music scene. Beerman, who founded Bowling Green University's electronic music program and new music festival, and Haraszti are pioneers in developing this highly technological, integrated art form. Only a handful of composers and dancers around the country are

even attempting what they have done together.

"It took us a year and a half to figure out how to do this," Beerman says. Most of their previous collaborations have involved prerecorded and live electronic music written and played by Beerman while Haraszti choreographed the movement. "We had a dialogue going, where music and dance were equally important. But we spoke two different languages, like French and English, and we needed an interpreter between my music and her movements."

THEY SEEM to have found a way around the communication gap with interactive video. "Now, Celesta is a musician; we no longer need an interpreter," Beerman says. "We're both girders in the structure of the work; neither element can stand on its own without the other."

The work was commissioned by the Masterworks Chorale to be shown as part of its "Music of Americans" concert at 4 p.m. Sunday. The text that the choir sings was written by Brent Beerman, the composer's son, who is on his way to the graduate program in playwriting at University of California, Los Angeles.

"After I received the commission, I started bugging my son for ideas for a text," Beerman says. "Finally, he told me of his idea for a poem that would deal with the problem of women historically deriving their identity from men. He wanted to show that that wasn't true, that women are not defined by their relationship with men but have their own identity — that's why the title is spelled differently, to show that they are not images of someone else."

Despite the strong feminist overtones to the title, Beerman insists that "Womin" is not a feminist propaganda piece. "It doesn't have as much to do with women as it does with humanity," he says.

"Woman is the focal point for the transformation, but it could just as well be a black man or a slave, someone whose self is defined through another's identity," Haraszti says.

The Masterworks Chorale will also perform folk songs, spirituals, and music from Broadway. Information is available from 243-1519.