

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1975

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A Gorple Grows in Brooklyn

By Alan M. Kriegsman

BROOKLYN, N.Y.—The first "performance" to attract much notice was an entirely fortuitous display of mushrooms by John Cage.

The 12th Annual Avant-Garde Festival of New York, situated this year at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, was supposed to have started at noon on Saturday with an hour's press preview. Here it was, well after 1 o'clock, and nothing but disarray and confusion. Only natural. What would the avant-garde be without disarray and confusion, virtually the official shibboleths of the movement. For that matter, where would the avant-garde be without John Cage, its patron saint?

Cage, now 63, was not only the enfant terrible who had introduced us to the "prepared" piano, electronic music, chance art and multimedia, but also one of the originators of the N.Y. Avant-Garde Festivals back in 1963, along with Charlotte Moorman, who has directed them ever since, Edgard Varese, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, David Behrman and Frederic Rzewski.

Now here he was, standing beside his car, looking a bit bewildered but immensely euphoric, beaming with benign pride over his mushrooms, which he seems to prize more highly than any art known to man. The car was filled with mushrooms, in baskets, on the seats, propped up above the dashboard, and spread out like a salesman's wares over the trunk lid and roof. Cage had driven that morning from East Hampton, stopping along the way to gather his beloved

fungi. There were great fat ones a foot in diameter, strange orange ones seamed like brains, all kinds. Cage stood caressing them gingerly, repeating their Latin names, showing off the delicately vanned underside of the "Lovely, aren't they," he cooed. "They're so bird-like."

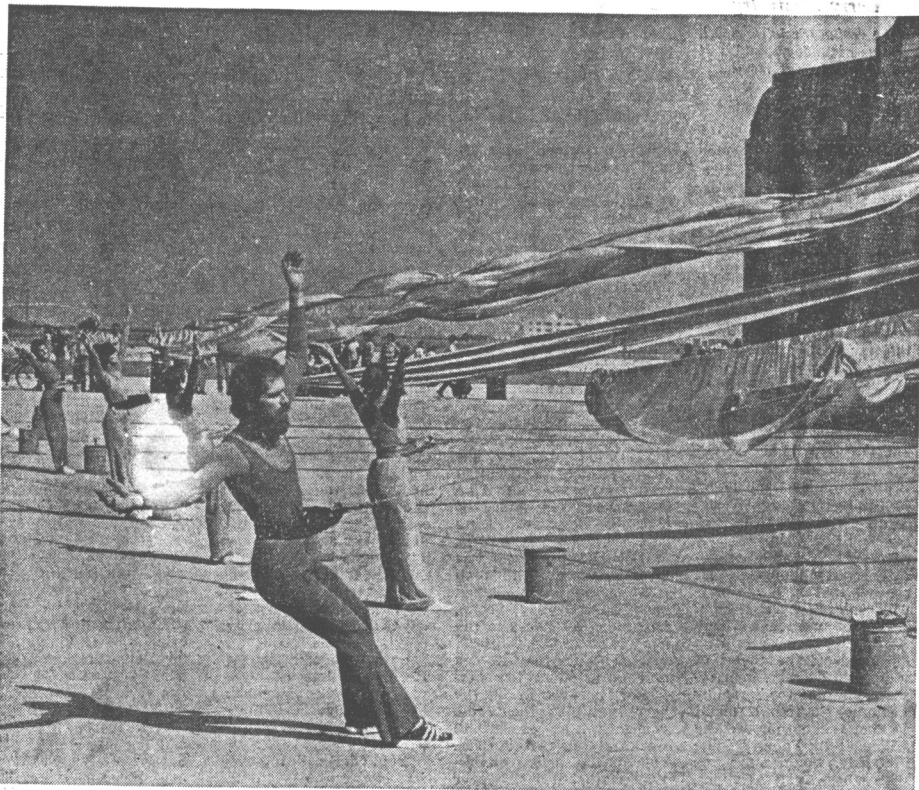
Floyd Bennett Field (Bennett had

been Adm. Byrd's co-pilot over the Pole) seemed an ideal choice for the event, with its enormous hangars, runways and gaping stretches of flat ground. Now a part of the Gateway National Recreation Area—a federal park project, like Wolf Trap, taking in

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John Cage with his mushrooms: The patron saint of the avant-garde.



Marilyn Wood and the Celebrations dance harnessed to streamers.

Photos by the Associated Press for the Washington Post

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sections of Brooklyn, Rockaway, Jamaica Bay, Staten Island and New Jersey's Sandy Hook—the airstrip offered just the kind of large, open expanse the festival needs (previous festivals had been held at Shea Stadium, Grand Central Station, Central Park and the Staten Island Ferry, among other places). Here the pliers of “air art”—inflatables, kites, happenings and “environments”—could do their stuff without hindrance.

Things were very late in starting. Yoko Ono arrived about 4 p.m. to commence her “event,” the planting of tiny trees along a 7,000-foot runway, each one to bring the fulfillment of a wish to its planter.

John Lennon, her ex-Beatle husband, was supposed to contribute a “found art” piece using one of the Floyd Bennett windsocks, but he was never to be found. Charlotte Moorman, the festival impresario best known for her topless cello playing, was scheduled to perform some music “Dance,” but this too was canceled, as was a “World War II Light Dance,” but this too was canceled, as was a “fireworks art” display by Nam June Paik.

Before the festival ended at midnight, there was constructed a multimedia environment called “Syn City II”; electronic music, holograms, videotapes, video games, edible art, computer art, rubber stamp art and synthesizer art.

What transpired during the afternoon was typical enough of the festival, which amounted to a giant esthetic fun house. Marilyn Wood and the Celebrations group performed a dance in front of one of the large hangars, for instance, in which each dancer was harnessed to a long silk streamer (re-cycled parts of artist Christo's “Valley Curtain,” it turned out) attached at the other end to the hanger entrance. The intertwining of the streamers caused by the dancers' gyrations became an arresting visual complement to the choreography.

In an enigmatic piece called “Extension Chords,” Eric Broaddus moseyed around on a skateboard, dolled up with war paint and a wooden contraption with movable “wings” that gave him the look of a kit-built Icarus.

In “Mouth,” a “theater piece” by Mark Ross, actress Barbara Neal spoofed the ritual formality of the restaurant waiter with the help of a gro-



Photos by the Associated Press for The Washington Post

“Mouth,” a “theater piece” by Mark Ross, actress Barbara Neal spoofs the ritual formality of the restaurant waiter.



Avant-Garde Festival: Eric Broaddus in an enigmatic piece called “Extension Cord.”

tesque gourmet mannequin created by Charlotte Rea.

Among other random items encountered *end passant* were a “paint-in”; a do-it-yourself orchestra with homemade instruments; a couple handing out alleged pieces of dinosaur bone; “transcendental aurora liquid projections,” i.e., a light show projected onto the surfaces of mammoth balloons; and mimeographed entries from The Neologos Project, a compendium of newly coined words, containing such terms as “psycosm,” “noaxis,” “inveneral,” and “gorple,” defined as “a semiconscious activity comprised of tiny repetitious movements which may portend contact with that miasmatic subcosm in which

tiny vernacular messages are so interlinked as to be unintelligible.”

The serious and the silly tend to mingle cozily at these affairs. The great boon of these festivals, however, is the opportunity they afford for off-beat artists to meet, collaborate and exhibit on an uncommonly grand scale.

The label “avant-garde,” seems to have lost most of its former connotations of insurgency and radicalism. A note on the festival program discloses that the event was partially supported by public funds from the N.Y. State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. How much more establishment can you get these days?