

My interest in Malachi and the Mass Resists had been piqued by a performance of theirs six months ago so I went to UWM especially to see them. The first time I saw them they were opening the drinking show at the annual Trashfest. I was immediately impressed by their elaborate appearance. The keyboard player was wrapped from head to toe, mummylike, in bandages. He kept pressing his hands against his ears as if the music (or perhaps some inner voices) were driving him mad. A guitar player sat Indian style on the stage floor. He was dressed in a grey, flowing, hooded robe made

out of a dyed bedsheet. His face was painted white with black tiger stripes running horizontally across it, breaking up the normal features and contours of his face. His eyes stared out, white and frightening. His black lips curled back to reveal gums, vividly red against his painted face, and teeth clenched in a wicked smile. The remaining two members; a girl who played a wooden flute and the singer/vocalist, were similarly costumed in the layered robes and painted faces, looking like some kind of demonic nomads.

The "music" started softly at first. In fact I wasn't sure they had even started. Then it slowly built up until it reached an intensity that, while not deafeningly loud, held my attention fast. A riveting bass line, rapped out on the guitar, set up a sort of counter melody to the sound wall of white/pink noise generated by the keyboards. The girl wandered around playing her flute; wafting from sweet little melodies to high pitched squeals. The vocalist surveyed the audience and waved a dummy tied to a crutch like a huge marionette and would, at times, say, scream or sing slogans and phrases. One number had him singing a bouncy little jingle; something to the effect of "smash the mother-fucking state" but with a jaunty, Las Vegas melodic bounce. It was all very entertaining, amusing and captivating.

Malachi and the Mass Resists are decidedly avant garde. They are self-described as a "multi-media performance experience which incorporates into its aesthetics, concepts such as mysticism, mindset group in-fusion, social ecology [and] entropy..." and is "highly interested in...the unification of the experimental underground...and the attraction of esoteric doctrines." Their music, if I am forced into comparisons, may be described as subtly intense (if that's not too paradoxical); with an industrial edge not unlike Boy Dirt Car and the intensity of early Big Black minus the volume or violence. Their songs are dark, moody and layered with a variety of musical inputs. Instruments range from the normal (used abnormally): keyboards, guitars, drums; to the unusual: pots and pans, kalimba, bells and a radiator.

The band is aesthetically commanding. In my interview with Malachi, the band's driving force, he mentions that the use of masks and costumes serves a dual purpose. They are able to maintain a purely artistic appearance (a'la Art for Art's Sake) as well as giving them a safe method for dispensing radical ideologies. This anonymity also adds a dimension of creative freedom which allows for creative chancetaking. Malachi also says that a lot of what they do is, in fact, "Art for Art's Sake", where the only concern is for the innate beauty in art itself. This, however, leads to a certain dichotomy in the band as the band is also overtly political. Their music contains ideological slogans of the liberal, political, religious, environmental and socio-economic nature. This leads to an "Art for Art's Sake" versus art conspired for social purposes rift. And yet there is no irony in this contradiction. It doesn't cause any strain or beg for explanations. In the same way that Oscar Wilde, social critic and proponent of Art for Art's Sake, said that "art never harms itself by keeping aloof from the social problems of the day," but later added that "art [should] set a standard to which life should aspire," Malachi straddles the issue. The band maintains a loose adherence to these artistic precepts and is heavily influenced by dada in which traditional artistic values are negated and treated with a deliberate irrationality.

One method of getting their message across is propaganda. The band uses propaganda subliminally by sampling taped loops of fragmented slogans cut up and pieced together in a jumble, much like T.S. Eliot's "heap of broken images", mirroring the very fragmentation that is today's society. Sometimes the band's message can be obscure or lost in the mix, while at other times they are more obvious. The slogans the band uses are purposefully vague or open-ended, leaving any suppositions to the audience. Their aim is only that you at least think. At UWM they littered the floor with posters proclaiming simply "THE END OF MUSIC", which I took to mean an end to the commercialization and idolatry that has made music so crass. No need for silly, poprock, one hit wonders; going from nothing to rock "superstar"



overnight without the slightest hint of originality, soul, or integrity; the very same thing that Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols vowed to destroy. It turns out I wasn't far wrong. Malachi is angered by how music has become nothing more than a commodity; a product that can be packaged and mass produced like vcr's, cars or tv dinners. "The end of music" means that the commercialization of music has put an end to the creativity involved in music as an art, and crushed the idea of performing one's music just for the sake of performing it. He is quick to agree that the term "music business" is an oxymoron.

Attacking the establishment is one example of the group's dadaist tendencies. They also delight in destroying icons. I'm not talking about the rock 'n' roll smashing of guitars or

amps which has become a parody of itself, instead they smash religious symbols or technological items (which have become "icons" in modern society).

The band also encourages audience participation during their shows. They like to break down the audience/performer barrier by using agitation. They will, at first, establish a clear cut performance area; possibly marking its boundaries with candles, tissue paper and various strange props. Staid and polite Milwaukee audiences fearfully respect this division. It makes them feel safe in otherwise unusual circumstances. In this increasingly Huxleyan world, audiences are trained, by today's mass culture (i.e. television), to be passive and impotent. But, after a short time, members of the band, and that number can vary up to 30 members, will begin breaking down this artificial wall and confronting the audience; turning the audience's complacency and apathy into fear. One aim, as Malachi put it, is to "promote an aesthetic fear" wherein "...[they] open the mind to suggestion. Because when people are in fearful states they are most open to suggestion." By these same methods they confront the world with its own hypocrisy.

They force the audience to deal with real problems, problems that people would prefer not to deal with. People tend to be satisfied to have their thoughts remain on a superficial level. By muting and supressing any deep thoughts, they don't provoke painful thoughts or an onslaught of disturbing emotions, and run the risk of destroying the stability and comfort they have built for themselves within the walls of nihilism and denial.

The band's UWM performance exhibited many of these methods. They began with a more or less structured song with a heavy, rolling bassline and the typical wall of sound created by sampling tapes. The keyboards added a soft melody, and a myriad of sounds, emanating from a trumpet, a floor tom from a drum set, and various pots and pans, filled out the sound. The most ominous and appealing songs were those that included the catchy basslines rolled out on an effects laden bass. The bassline acted as a backbone for their songs, cutting through the wall of sound and allowing the various other sounds to work off of it. Disappointingly, the vocalizations could not be heard as a large crowd gathered and watched curiously. The music maintained its usual tension at first but weakened amidst all of the member's antics, especially when Malachi put down his bass and joined the fray. Without the ambience of the bass, some of the strong tension dissipated and the overall sound weakened. Some of the antics seemed silly and distracting while others were interesting. At one point a uniformed fascist type and other symbolically dressed forces subdued our poor prophet Malachi. They

It means a messenger, Malachi said.

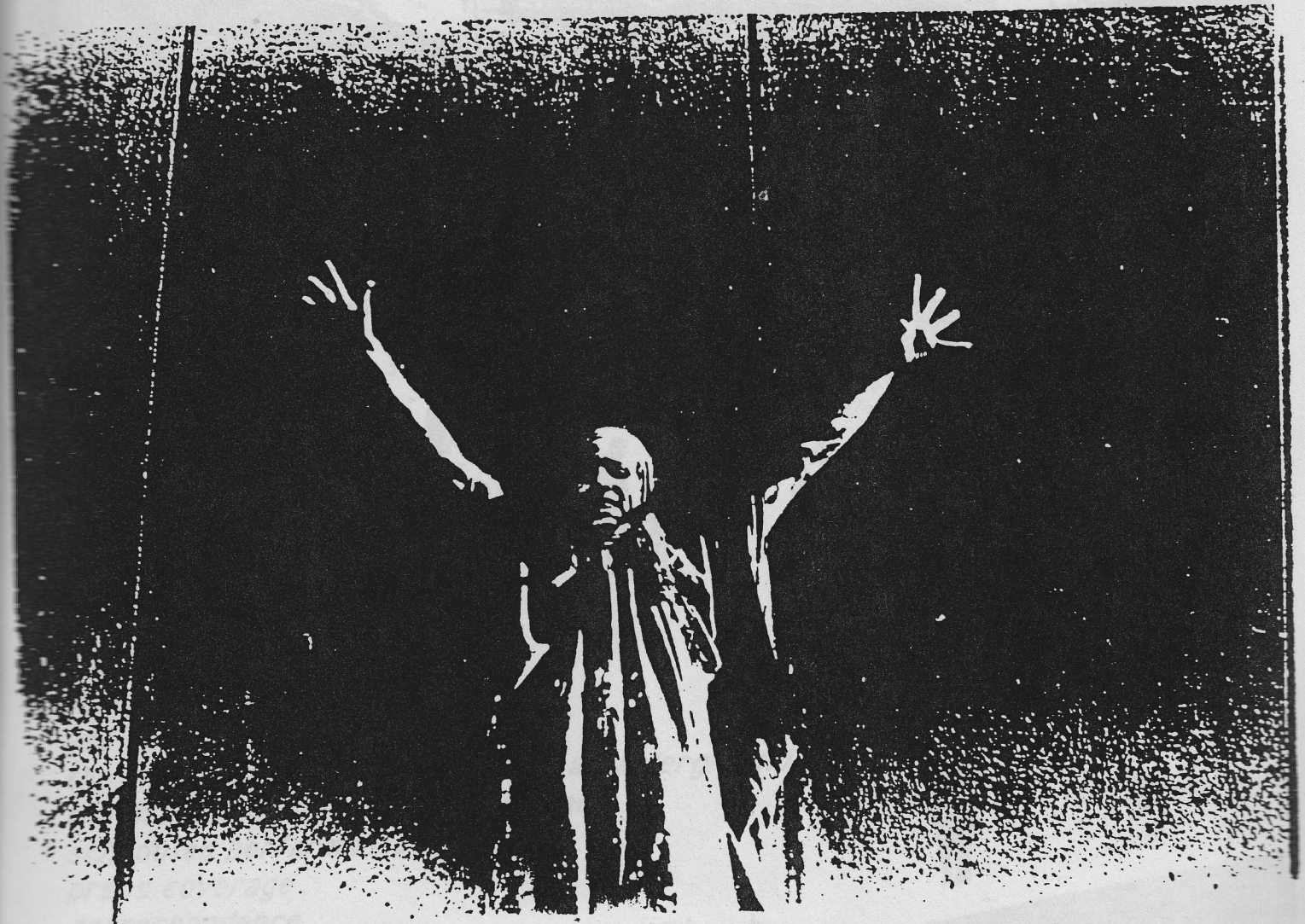


tied him up, beat him and dragged him across the floor. In the end one might wonder if these performances, especially the music, aren't just impromptu jams, especially the way everyone capriciously switches instruments. As it turns out, performances are actually deliberately, intelligently and energetically planned. And, once one takes the time to analyze a performance, it does seem to have a certain cohesiveness.

I haven't the space, time, or energy required to give my impressions of their taped works. Suffice it to say they are incredible. I suggest you hunt them down, put on some headphones and lose yourself in a journey through your consciousness.

And, finally, Malachi is, perhaps most of all, interested in "networking". In fact he has a real affinity for the word and the idea. He is involved with Galivant Media which works within a framework of creative and artistic expression without the commercial pressures of the music industry. He is interested in contacting and corresponding with any and all bands, musicians and artistic types (and we are all artistic!) and any form of the media. If you would like to contact him you can write to: Malachi/ P.O. Box 170331 San Francisco, CA 94117

SPACEBAC RICOCHET June/July 1987 by Scott Grimm



*Most performances are roughly 45 minutes long.*