

## Alea III heard in 5 string works

**ALEA III.** *Théodore Antoniou, music director — In a concert of music by Kelemen, Vercoe, Kirchner, Castaldo, and Lutoslawski, at Boston University School for the Arts Thursday night.*

By Richard Dyer  
Globe Staff

The word "alea" comes from the Greek "to roam," and Theodore Antoniou's performance ensemble Alea III (his third such group, in his third city) roams through various contemporary musical directions, styles, and performance practices. His program last Thursday was devoted to current writing for strings by five leading composers, two of them resident in Greater Boston.

This may have been a little bit too much of a good idea. There was considerable diversity of style and expression, but after awhile the ear retreated from all the shuffling that is characteristic of contemporary string writing in its more intense moments.

The most astonishing of the pieces was probably the 3d String Quartet by Leon Kirchner, a work that won the Pulitzer Prize back in 1967. The music is conceived as a "confrontation" between electronic and human means; the "conventional" string quartet — very unconventionally used — is in constant dialogue with filtered electronic sounds on tape. The composer has stressed the *fun* he had in writing this quartet, and it is certainly fascinating to listen to because of its complete originality, the fantasy of the interplay of textures of sound — it has the exotic colors, the complex play of light and shadow, the sudden variations of temperature and the wild animal

cries of a tropical rain forest. The performance by Ann Leathers, Craig Burkett, Lorraine Hunt and Stephen Harrison was the exciting product of nearly five months of dedicated rehearsal.

Joseph Castaldo's 1978 String Quartet is both more eclectic and more conventional — in "emergent form" wild events alternate with lyrical, tonal ones until the piece ends in an exciting ostinato. The radical juxtapositions in this quartet shouldn't work, but the piece is good enough to make its own laws. One particularly striking effect was the occasional entry of the singing voices of the four players, which was particularly ethereal because in this instance all four remarkable instrumentalists were women — Diane Nicholakis, Sarah Reed, Anne Black, and Karen Keravek.

Barry Vercoe's "Synapse" is another "dialogue" piece for viola and tape; like all of his music, it appeared to be both lyrical and compellingly dramatic, but a misjudgment about volume level drowned out too much of Scott Woolweaver's expert playing. The program opened and closed with works for all the assembled string players. Milko Kelemen's etude-like "Alphabetarium" is a kind of "Mikrokosmos" for strings, a survey in 26 short sections of most of the techniques of contemporary string-writing. Antoniou chose 18 of these, announcing each by a geographical title ("Amsterdam ... Baltimore ... Casablanca"). And Witold Lutoslawski's "Prelude and Fugue for 13 Solo Strings" is a wonderful application of many of those techniques to completely musical and expressive ends.