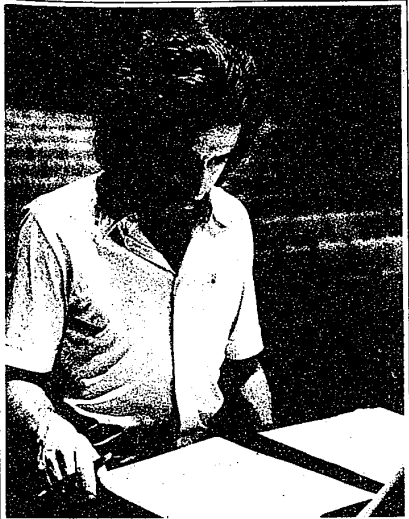


Writing 'soundtrack' for a play isn't easy

By GAIL DeGEORGE
Sharpened pencils with big erasers and a stack of clean music paper are the tools composer Mark David Gottlieb uses in his work. "Sometimes it's scary when you start



Composer Mark David Gottlieb relies on sharpened pencils with big erasers and a stack of clean music paper in his work.

writing a piece of music," said Gottlieb, who wrote the original musical score for Oakland University's production of "Turn of the Screw." "You put the pencil in your hand and start writing little dots down — and it works."

"Turn of the Screw," playing through Dec. 2 in the Studio Theatre on Oakland's campus, is based on a novel by Henry James. The new version is written and directed by Adeline Hirschfeld-Medalia, director of the university's Theatre Arts Program.

It is the story of a governess who cares for two children who appear to be possessed by the spirits of a former governess and male servant, both of whom died under mysterious circumstances.

Working under a grant from Michigan Council for the Arts, Gottlieb has used orchestra, chorus and percussion to convey the evil theme that pervades the play.

Although he has written operas and other pieces of music, "Turn of the Screw" is his first music for a program. Writing the "soundtrack" of the play posed some interesting problems, he said.

"I had to identify in some respect with everyone in the story," he explained.

"Sometimes you can read a book and you can identify with one or two characters. But with this, I had to be pretty much conscious of everyone."

Gottlieb, 27, likes to describe himself as a California-based Michigan composer. He was born in Michigan, but grew up in California.

He moved back to Michigan and attended Oakland University to study under Stanley Hollingsworth, assistant professor of music and the university's

composer-in-residence.

Gottlieb is moving back to California for about a year and a half, but intends to return briefly to Michigan next fall when Temple Israel performs one of his operas.

Composing complicated works takes a good deal of time and the young composer must plan his life in big sections. The work for "Turn of the Screw" was done during the summer, much of it conceptualized during a backpacking trip in the Sierras.

His work as a composer leaves no time for a full class load, said Gottlieb, who is no longer a student.

"This opera I am working on now is taking an awful lot of time, and I think it's important that I spend all of my creative energy in this respect — just working on the opera and trying to write something that I feel will be substantial."

Gottlieb knows how instruments work, can play a little piano French horn and clarinet. "It gives me an understanding of what is going on with the players; the problems players have."

There are always problems with interpretation and players and conductors not quite communicating what he wants in a piece, said Gottlieb. Whoever is conducting, however, would probably do a better job than he would, Gottlieb continued with a smile.

The composer's other pursuits include sailing and hiking.

His long range goals are undefined, but include some fundamental beliefs about society, he said.

"Words only work so far. When you start speaking with words, you start segregating situations."

"Whenever you use words, you're dealing with inequality. Some people can understand and some people can't. Music is sometimes a little more giving than that," he explained.

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