Kevin Concannon
When The Beatles announced in 1966 that they would no longer be touring, their stated reason was that they could no longer " reproduce" their music in a live concert setting. Specifically, they cited their use of special studio effects and the impracticality of touring with the orchestral personnel whom they used on their recordings. The end of touring for The Beatles represents a milestone not only for that legendary pop group, but for the history of twentieth century music as well. Another era was ending. The Beatles had used this technology to change the course of modern music—and modern art. To better understand the oncoming strew of all art of sound recordings, a little brushing up is in order.

During the years since Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, audio technology has kept pace with the latest in the computer world. When The Beatles quit touring, the technology that allowed multiple overdubbing of voices and instruments depended upon simple tape recording equipment; today it would be considered garage band technology. These days, any band worth its press packet tends to have an arsenal of digital electronics. Digital electronics are the result of computer technology that didn't exist as The British invaded twenty years ago. They've drastically changed the course of music. Modern music is characterized not so much by time signature or tonal scales as it is by the working method through which the final product is realized. Few contemporary composers write their music with the aid of an electronic notation; few indeed can read music. Most pop composers create their work on tape, building layer upon layer, track upon track, much the same way a sculptor or a painter works. The process of creating music involves an interactive relationship between the materials and the idea with which the artist begins.

"It's rather like making a drawing or painting which you start with no specific idea other than the way the colors look on the brush or the color and to let it just happen," explains the multi-media artist Jonathan Borofsky. For many years now, Borofsky has been interested not only in paintings and drawings, but huge sculptures of figures hammering and chattering away, and ping pong games whose visitors are encouraged to play. "About four years ago was the first time that ping pong game was becoming increasingly important in my work. Some examples: the ping pong table where people would be playing ping pong and you could hear the energy of the ball hitting the table, and the people excitedly playing within the whole context of the exhibition, or the hammering men which have these motors that a certain white to them and were hammering all around the room. And I realized how important those internal sounds were to the complete fulfillment of the exhibition. Hence I began to develop ideas that would fulfill the idea of sound installations." One of the earliest was a tape piece called Sounds of the World which included tape-recorded sounds of many varieties, separated by brief moments of silence.

New recording technology now makes it possible to downsample and digitize all music as "Borofsky's new recording, out this past fall, uses sounds—of pebbles being thrown into a bucket, sheets of metal with various gauges being thrown onto a bed of sand, a spinning bicycle wheel slowed down in the recording, and electrical components in the sounds. Contrary to the traditional idea of accurately reproducing real sounds, high technology has now been used to distort them. According to Ed Tomney, his collaborator on sound works, the only musical traditions on the universe released only as a cassette tape are guitar and voices. And even these instruments have been electronically treated. Citing the common practice of pop record producers to dub and quadruple guitar parts—by having the guitar player run through them several times and layering them one on the other—the end result is usually greatly unrelated to symphonic music.

"Go to Avery Fisher Hall and see easily 60 voices, anger going up and down. They are doing the same thing—doubling parts in many of the symphonic scores. It's not music, it's an acoustic instrument being transmitted through an acoustic space. It's interesting how it's a way of emphasizing the elements of the music. Sometimes laying out an otherwise symphonic part is not enough. The whole issue with tape is that you have control over the time event because you can hit 'STOP' and go back and reregister," says Tomney. "A lot of new music that we've been working on and that I've been working on—a part of my approach is that I want to create a visual picture with the music. I like that idea very much. To me, it's one of the most attractive things about music—that it's a referential medium like reading. It makes you refer to images in your mind as well.

The cassette by Tomney and Borofsky features a number of different types of "songs." The track that features the pebbles, sheet metal and bicycle wheel, entitled We, presents a vision of everyday life in spiraling sets—the dogs in the neighborhood. We wanted to create this character of creatures or entities—almost an archeological entity—that has watched civilization for many years and just gives you the image of the dog—one

Kevin Concannon produces radio broadcasts about artists and writes frequently about sound art and phonograph records by visual artists. He is based in Boston.

Borofsky is also featured on a new record entitled Artounds. Producer Jeff Gordon (who organized Revolutions Per Minute for the National Air Record for the Forest) Feldman Gallery a few years back has gathered some of the most interesting artists on this project, available in general and special limited editions, featuring original graphics by all of the artists. Painter Larry Rivers, a longtime jazz sax player, appears with his combo. Two members of the rock band The Tuohes, Michael Cotten and Prance Prince, contributed an electronic track called Tiny Places. And for what might well become an all-time classic of the new trend of "crossover" artmusic, performance artist Vera Adams has been paired with rock band Run DMC, who provide backtracking for her song Switch 247. "For me it's all music," says Gordon. As with Gordon's last music project, Artounds will tour the museum circuit as an exhibit of graphics accompanied by Walkman-style headphones playing the audio tracks. The major difference between this and his last project is that Artounds will benefit from the more formidable press and distribution efforts of Polygram Records.

While audio by artists has been around so since the sound poetry recordings of Futurist and Dada artists in the early part of this century, these recent works suggest that the great advances in twentieth century music owe more to the pop music industry than to the tradition of all music itself. The collage style of Tomney/ Borofsky and the other different aspects of the overdubbed and sampled sounds that have been a staple of pop music production since the Beatles. And Laurie Anderson's success, due largely to her musicality, suggests not only the open nature to new ideas, but their familiarly with and hunger for more electronic sophistication. The three-chord wonder of the pop record industry is deeply dependent upon the unlimited equivalence of postmodernism and post- productions.

In essence, pop production is not only one more component of consumer packaging—everything from visual presentation to press and marketing. Artounds, while artistically and formally inconsistent, relies on the more peripheral aspects of packaging for its identity. Rock stars have been brought into the project in order to broaden the product's demographic base. Contributing artists are presenting as plaintiff as possible; there will be little doubt where their artistry is focused, and a better reference for the music for clues—the accompanying graphics clearly represent the "art" part. Intentionally, the music has been designed for easy reading.

Content and packaging are not, of course, mutually exclusive. And content and packaging may well serve as much to expand public understanding of the music as to music by artists. Art music owes a lot to "commercial" work, and the once of the methods of both are understood, one will be hard pressed to substantiate the naive distinctions as new stand.