

Back to the Futurists

The machines dance at ARTSaha!

by Ken Mayer

Dedicated to futurism, this year's ARTSaha! festival explores the artistic movement that began in the early 1900s. Futurists disliked ideas from the past, especially political and artistic traditions, and lauded the technological triumph of humans over nature.

For the past four years, the Analog Arts ensemble has been staging the ARTSaha! festival in Omaha to present new music, imaginative realizations of old music, and performance events.

The festival will present a rare performance Saturday, Sept. 8 of the original 1924 *Ballet Mécanique* film and orchestral score at UNO's Strauss Performing Arts Center. French artist Fernand Léger created the abstract 16-minute film about the dance, or ballet, of objects and machinery at work that so fascinated the futurist artists. American composer George Antheil was commissioned to compose the film's score. Antheil's work will be familiar to Omaha Symphony concertgoers as Thomas Wilkins, the orchestra's music director, programmed Antheil's 5th Symphony last year.

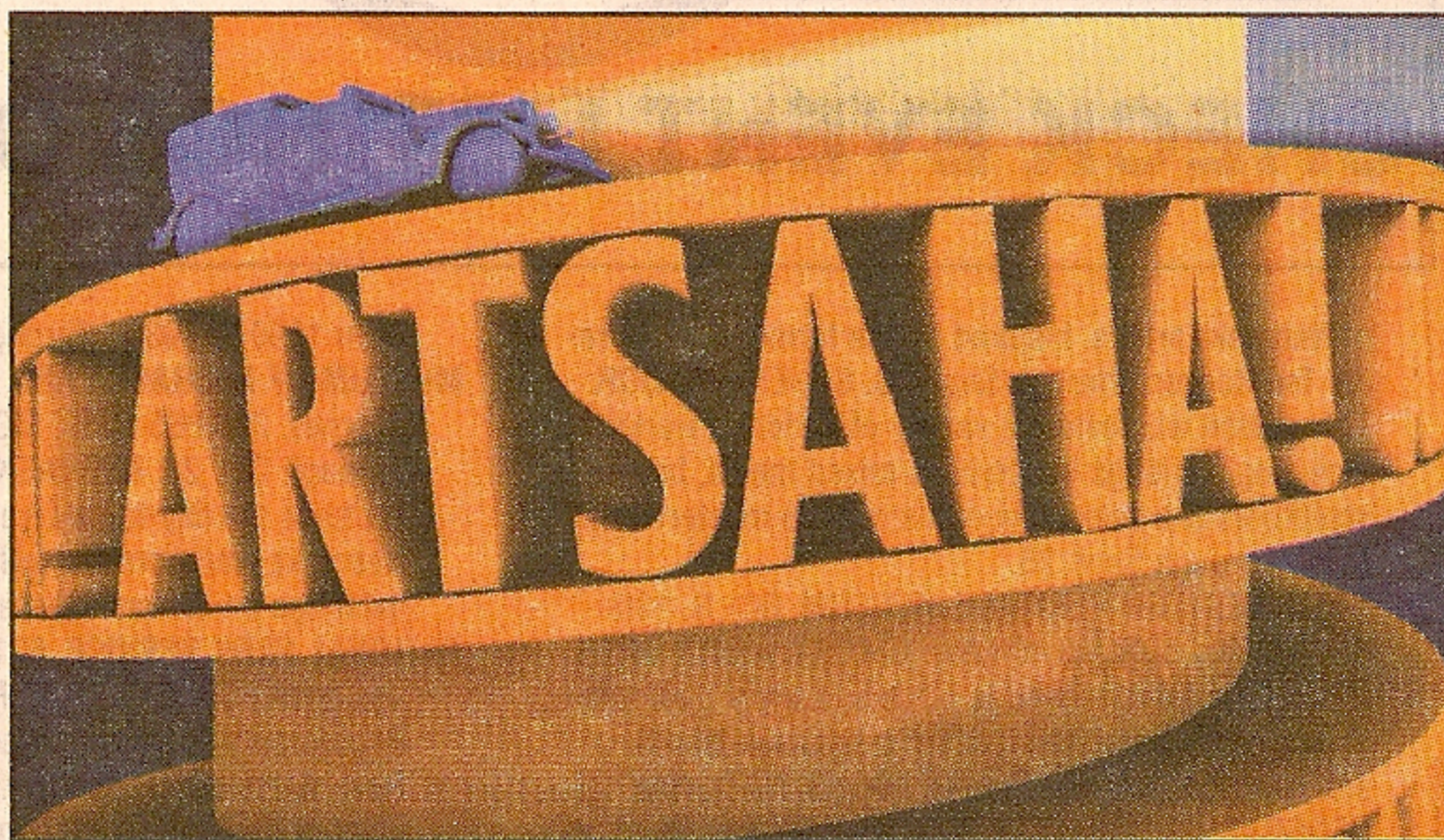
Antheil's score calls for 16 synchronized play-

er pianos, plus percussion. The original score and film were not shown together until 1990 when new technology made performance possible. The ARTSaha! concert will include four electronic player pianos synchronized via MIDI with two live pianos, four bass drums, three xylophones, bells, fans, whistles, sirens and propellers thrown in.

While the *Ballet Mécanique* instrumentation is clear, the festival organizers aren't talking about what instruments will take the stage Tuesday, Sept. 11 for the Iron Composer Omaha: Competition and Concert. Based on TV's "Iron Chef," the Iron Composer combatants will enter "Music Stadium" at the Strauss at noon, ready to do battle. Five competitors, ages 18-26 years old, will be chosen through an open application process.

"Those five students, at high noon, will be given the secret ingredient, which will include which instruments they will be writing for, plus an

as-yet-to-be-disclosed, secret musical ingredient they must use in their composition," said University of Nebraska at Omaha Music Theory, Composition and Technology Professor Dr. Kenton Bales. "It could be a melodic theme, it could be a chord progression, it could be rhythm,



it could be almost any element of music."

The students will have five hours to compose a short piece for that instrumentation. At 5 p.m. they will turn in their works and the ensemble will rehearse the pieces (about 2-minutes long) for a 7:30 p.m. performance.


The panel of judges will include Maestro Wilkins, Drake University in Des Moines

Composition Chair Robert Dougherty and Omaha Symphony clarinetist and Analog Arts Board member John Klinghammer.

To make things interesting, one of the judges will actually perform the works instead of listening. The winning composers will walk away with \$500 cash money for first place, \$250 for second and \$100 for third.

UNO's "Ecoutez" concert series will kick off its season Saturday, Sept. 8 as part of the festival with a celebration of groundbreaking classical music, including Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

The festival ends Saturday, Sept. 15 with an electronic music concert in the Mallory Kountze Planetarium featuring visions of the future from Nostradamus to Al Gore to Jules Verne to the Italian Futurists.

An open-air experience Wednesday, Sept. 12 will feature the campus carillon ringing out a mix of music by John Cage, Martin Luther, and a new composition by Dr. Bales. A classic Iron Maiden tune is also on the program. Rock on, carillon dude. Do you know "Freebird?" 

ARTSaha! runs Sept. 7-15 at various Omaha venues. Most events are FREE. Tickets to select events cost \$10-\$15 at the door. For a full events listing visit artsaha.org.