Mercer Arts Center

Pinch of Moog, a dash of light
by Richard Nusser

For more than a century Greenwich Village enjoyed an international reputation as a cultural incubator as well as a host of resident geniuses capable of transforming them into great art. From Poe to geniusescapable of transforming cube to swarm with avant-garde tional reputation as a cultural in-

them into great art. From Poe to geniusescapable of transforming cube to swarm with avant-garde tional reputation as a cultural in-

culture of the Village, March 304 houses, gaudy boutiques, souvlaki to the present-day Village most no-

looked as if that tradition was about to fade away forever, given the present-day Village most no-

able for high-rise apartment houses, greedy boutiques, souvenir-

stands, and Mafia discotheques. Rent and crime rates have soared and the club scene is just now trying to get back on its feet. Developers are swamping in a wake of rock 'n' roll festivals. The walking wounded of the welfare state and the drug cul-
ture threaten to drive patrons of the arts off the streets, back up-
town, or to the suburbs to feed on straw-hat theatre and an oc-
casional visit from the Boston Pops.

But thanks to a combination of circumstances, and a handful of individuals, it now appears possible that the tide may be turning. Economic conditions and an over-

abundance of talented artists in every field are contributing to improved conditions, but these factors alone won't insure a cul-
tural renaissance here, or anywhere else, unless artists have places to meet, perform, experi-

ment, and — last but by no means least — earn a living.

On the bright side we have Westbeth, for all the troubles it's gone through, producing artistic returns with dance concerts, art shows, theatre, and an in-house video hook-up that could be the forerunner of a much larger cul-
tural communications system. Not to mention the sense of community that's been established there.

Solo has survived and brought the art scene back downtown, where it once belonged. Several recording studios have sprung up here in the past year or so, at-

tracting some of the biggest names in the music business. Even John Lennon and Yoko Ono, who call the Village their "spirit-

ual home," want to settle here permanently.

Most of these endeavors have a state subsidy or an audience they can depend on for their economic survival, but the latest addition to the Village's avant-garde community, the media artist, faces a more daunting plight. These cultural pioneers hope to humanize technology. But synthe-

sizing one's emotions on an acoustic guitar, or through the sounds of one's own voice, is a far

thousand bucks less expensive than pushing them through an electronic synthesizer. And there seem to be more capable media artists, representing everything from video to electronic music, at large in New York today than in any other place on the globe.

Credit for this is due the New York State Council on the Arts, among very few others. That agency has funded many of the projects involving people who are building a sound base for a tech-

nological arts movement. Sey-

mour Kaback and Irving Koven are two names that might be added to the list of supporters. Kaback, a prosperous air conditioning contractor, and Koven,
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