



Dynamic, versatile Jana Haimsohn ebbs and flows with primal musical technique.

## Music

**Jana Haimsohn**—poet, singer,  
dancer

**Mal Waldron**—pianist

**Ed Blackwell**—drummer

An unusual combination of music, poetry, dance, and vocalization was presented recently in Los Angeles, in an equally unusual setting. "The Music Room" of the old and stately Biltmore Hotel hosted a concert by three extremely talented out-of-towners from the East Coast. Primarily featuring the poet-singer-dancer Jana Haimsohn, the names of pianist Mal Waldron and drummer Ed Blackwell were, in fact, better known to the jazz community here.

Three artistic organizations were responsible for making the project possible; the Foundation for Art Resources, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, and Beyond Baroque (the latter is a group dedicated to the furtherance of poetry and poets). Haimsohn lives and works in New York, and her performance reflects the intensity of that environment. The program began with Haimsohn alone onstage for some 20 minutes of unaccompanied

poetry that can best be described as cathartic.

Using gestures, facial contortions, and extraordinary changes of pitch to accentuate a point, Haimsohn ran a gamut from hip street talk to social consciousness to the mundanities of housewifery. One of her favorite techniques is the use of alliteration ("potent polymorphic body parts..." "chemically, comically, astrologically..."). Another interesting feature is the sudden switch from spoken to sung words, often elongating syllables, as in a poem about "s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g the truth."

When Blackwell took over at his drum set, he established an African-tinged beat. Haimsohn, in turn, became a Zulu warrior, a ritualistic Mammon-worshipper, or simply an incredibly flexible, undulating body writhing back and forth, up and down, side to side—as free flowing as had been her words. The two were presently joined by an elegantly attired Waldron (three-piece suit and tie, in contrast to Blackwell's African *dashiki*), who first offered some solo piano improvisations. Blackwell and Haimsohn then returned, with the latter now singing in "tongues."

She has refined her vocal instrument to the very razor's edge of perfection. To describe her outpourings as

uninhibited would be an understatement. Her voice changes tone and timbre constantly; the sounds emitted are sometimes a cry, now a laugh, now a long sigh. Rarely are there any words, often it is animal-like (with facial and bodily manipulations to match). Haimsohn has worked with some of the jazz avant gardists, and occasionally, her voice will take on the atonal, almost coarse quality found in the playing of such jazzmen as trumpeter Don Cherry or saxophonist Ornette Coleman.

Both Waldron and Blackwell, who have been making music probably as long as Haimsohn has been alive, appeared to be immensely enjoying their participation in this event. Each of them gave the impression of valuing the freedom of expression that Haimsohn's diversities allowed them. It must be stated that this kind of self-expressive creativity can either go entirely over one's head, or else totally hold the attention. The latter reaction was, for the most part, apparent at the Music Room. Haimsohn—vocally, poetically and in her primal dance movements is almost narcotic. Possibly dangerous for the faint of heart! Nevertheless, a highly rewarding experience. □

—Frankie Nemko-Grabam