

# Goodbye and Hello to the lovely man



Composer **Harold Budd** is forefather to a whole world of ambient musical soundscaping, minimalist piano, which Budd long ago titled *Lovely music*. *Lovely music's* roots stretch back to Budd's Californian and Mojave desert past, to art and architecture, as well as the West Coast minimalist sound. Here *Fourth Door* delves into this longer picture, along with his myriad collaborative projects with the likes of Robin Guthrie, David Sylvian, and Jah Wobble, which culminated in a – as it happened, premature – testimonial celebration at the 2005 Brighton Festival.

Four years ago, far away, in fact 6000 miles away, in an unknown quarter of the city of quartz: Los Angeles, one of the masters of a music which helped define and shape what became known as the 80's and 90's ambient art music scene, pianist and composer, Harold Budd, was preparing for his farewell pre-retirement concert. Perhaps surprisingly, albeit to the host city, Brighton Festival's organisers grateful gain, Budd had accepted an invitation from the Festival to be very special guest at an evening showcasing different parts of his long and luminous career. 'I felt Brighton was a perfect ending to a really interesting career', he would say down a transatlantic telephone line a few weeks before the concert.

The concert turned into the contemporary music highlight of the 2005 festival. In the pre-concert phone call interview Budd ran through the itinerary for me. Fielding a string of guests, both announced and unannounced, to celebrate the event, these included Robin Guthrie – erstwhile half of the sorely missed Cocteau Twins, and long term mainstay collaborator with Budd; guitarist Bill Nelson from mid seventies *Bebop Deluxe* as well as vocalist John Foxx from pre *Midge Ure Vienna Ultravox* and Japan's Steve Janson. Also in the mix was Jah Wobble whose peripatetic dub bass lines would anchor the evening's finale, what Budd billed as a mega-jam in 4/5. Prior to hitting that groove Janson was to play an unrecorded piece by Budd, *Lirio*,

composed, as it happens, 'for solo gong' and written, Budd related, when he was challenged in a Guadalajara café to write a piece there and then, on the spot. Half an hour later *Lirio* was the result.

The evening, Budd told me, 'will to be a long programme divided in two parts', beginning with a string quartet, bringing in Alexander Balanescu, one of the so far unannounced guests, followed by a series of brief guitar duets, and solo piano pieces from different periods in Budd's 35 year long career.

After the break and part two's warm-up solo gong piece, *Lirio*, 'this will move into a long textured atmospheric piece with Guthrie'. Up on stage with Guthrie will be Fila Brazilia and Steve Cobble on laptop, who played with Budd when Harold performed at the Big Chill Festival a few years back. 'Everyone', he says of the whole evening, 'will shine in their own special way'.

When the evening finally came round a sense of occasion did indeed permeate the air. As the anticipatory pathos to this valedictory evening began to fade, the event at times seeming to outshine the performers. From the 22nd row in Brighton's Dome theatre, Budd, dwarfed by the enormous Steinway piano, almost out of sight at times, looked small by comparison, particularly from this distance towards the back of the hall. The special guests walked on one by one, understatedly shuffling into place centre stage. And one by one they