

# MOBIUS NEWSLETTER

354 CONGRESS STREET, BOSTON  
(FORT POINT) 617 542-7416

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"Comedy is the last refuge of the nonconformist mind."  
Gilbert Seldes, 1954

"Anyone who sees and paints a sky green and pastures  
blue ought to be sterilized."  
Adolph Hitler, 1944

## Mobius Installation(s) & Performances

Richard Lerman

Installations: Jan. 28 - Feb. 1  
Performances: Jan. 28, 30  
and Feb. 1 performance with  
David Moss

I have wanted to present some older work and new work of mine in Boston and have wanted to use the Mobius space for this. Part of this desire has grown out of watching how the space has been used by other artists/performers. Not just in the sense of "this is a great space," but also I have been inspired and amazed by the nature of and wide range of the work I've heard and seen here over the last 2 1/2 years.

I am a Sound Artist.

Terms always give me a difficult time. Mostly, I follow process in the creative work I find myself engaged in, at a given time. I think there is value in being pinned down to define what is going on in

one's work, and for me that has always happened after-the-fact. It doesn't bother me, even though I often get caught tongue tied when trying to tell someone about what-it-is-that-I-do.

I know it comes first as an act of perceiving or having perceived.

I know that I listen a lot. I like looking at light. I make translations in my brain and perceivings (the acts of perceiving--not the later realization or 'perceptions') between sound and light.

The expression of all this emerges as process/product.

Performance is a way of tapping into moments.

So the ideas or explainings are probably not new. The process in a general way may not be new. It becomes unique to me, though.

For several years, I've been concerned with making microphones from many different materials. The

reasons are many. WHAT IS A MICROPHONE ANYWAY??

Well, the ones sold in stores do a certain job better or worse depending on how much they cost, the space or environment in which they are used, the recording device or loudspeaker they feed, where someone using them places the microphone in the space or environment. etc.

They are meant to represent accurately what our ear perceives. Does your hearing perceive as mine does?

Throw a rock in a pool and watch the ripples.

Make a sound in a room and hear the ripples.

Does your vision see as mine?

In a darkened room turn a light on then off.

The vibrations and ripples in a room or environment strike each surface in that room.

A microphone made of copper or aluminum or paper or plastic translates any vibration through its own 'materialness.' For me, it becomes another way to feel any material, and in performances explores the moment.

Last winter, I performed a work-in-progress at Mobius called METAL MICROPHONE MUSIC. The piece used different microphones, self-built from various materials. Using about six different metal mics, and some Silvertone records I made in arcades while a small child, and a tape from the National Center for Stuttering, the piece became an exploration of my stuttering which I know has deeply affected my listening.

An image in this piece was so strong that I followed it. That was the image of sound locked inside a material (person) which clamors to get out. I used a small butane torch in the piece to 'release' the sound in the metal mics--and the ensuing expansion & contractions in the metals became tension/release.

As an abstraction of this, I performed a piece this summer in Berlin called CHANGING STATES for metal mics and torch. The complexity and range of sounds is astonishing. The heat is heard and felt.

In fact, both these pieces owe their 'seeing light of day,' to a super 8 film from my TRANSDUCER SERIES shot in 1984 of a long strip of copper burglar alarm tape as microphone. The tape had a sticky substance on it which could only be gotten off with a propane torch. The film was shot outdoors on a cold winter day.

(Transducer -- microphone -- the words mean the same thing.)

I will perform these pieces in addition to a piece called MUSIC FOR PLINKY and STRAWS. This piece uses 2 self-built transducers. A plinky being a small piezo electric disk with different lengths and gauges (#4/0-#1) of harpsichord wire soldered to it.

The straws are your everyday plastic bendable type which are fitted over a small microphone element. They function like an organ pipe and have some wonderful acoustic properties when spun, bent and cut with scissors.

I will be doing a version of this piece at New Music America in the Astrodome in Houston under the title, A MATTER of SCALE in April '86.

Some of the older pieces I will be offering at Mobius include some done for magnetic tape at the Brandeis

Electronic Music Studio between the years 1965 and 1969. I will also show some films from then, including one called THIRD BOOK of EXERCISES for performer and film.

Having gotten very involved with audio cassette technology as a physical thing to manipulate, I want to perform a new piece called FOURTH BOOK of EXERCISES.

Fourth Book will be recorded onto an audio cassette, which will be unthreaded from the cassette. My objective as performer is to thread the tape by hand through a cassette playback system--mimicking the earlier 3rd Book which used 1/4" tape. Wish me luck.

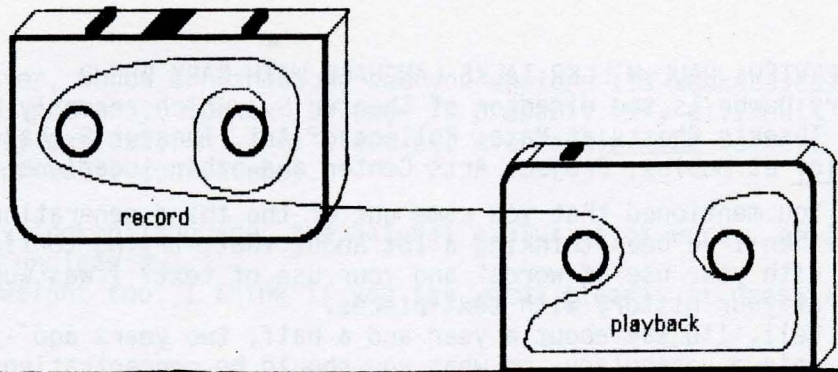
I'm fond of the piece because I was scolded by a certain music professor years ago for doing such a piece at a concert.

The installation will consist of sound objects which change part of the room into an instrument. It will use woven metal mesh, paper, video tape, and harpsichord wire.

And, on February 1, the performance will be with percussionist/singer David Moss, which will be the first time we will have played together publicly.

David and I have collaborated on some outdoor events together, and have listened to and observed each

other's work for several years. He has always been challenging to me in his own sound art/ performing, and has also been very articulate in his support for new sound art/music.



MOBIUS PERFORMING GROUP  
PREVIEW NEWS

The Mobius Performing Group will be presenting a program of "shorter" pieces from February 20 - March 8. The pieces will include UH-OH ... by Victor Young and Julie Rochlin (first performed with Boston Performance Artists at Mobius in November 1985) and PIG BABY, AGAIN by Marilyn Arsem and Bob Raymond (a continuation of work shown in Works-in-Progress and Pleasure/Addiction/Danger). Some text and information from these pieces follows -- look for further information in our next newsletter!

PIG BABY, AGAIN (working title)

a performance by Bob Raymond and Marilyn Arsem, February 20 - March 8, 1986.

On collaborating: is there a way to integrate opposing perspectives? Is it possible to arrive at a mutual point from opposite directions? Strong egos and stubbornly held ideas can be difficult to work through.

PIG BABY, AGAIN will be a full-length piece, based on two previous shorter versions that we've performed in the past two years.

We're interested in ideas of ritual and metaphor - in performing familiar, everyday activities using unfamiliar materials. The result is surreal imagery, hopefully open to multiple interpretation.

These are some of our experiences that have helped to form the basis of this piece:

°Walking in a grocery store you see many unfamiliar items. What if we could sew together an entire animal from all the parts found in the meat cases? Pigs' ears, feet, fat, hearts, skin, tongues...

°Keeping a vegetable garden is a remarkable activity. Birthing new life-forms, caring for them, watching them mature, harvesting them, eating them.

A curious feeling emerges upon seeing the last of something. The last crop of Kentucky Wonders: autumn rituals have in part to do with Saying Good-bye to the Last Green Bean.

°Dream from 1975: breaking open a loaf of freshly-baked bread and finding it full of hair - lots of hair tangled and steaming in the dough, stretching out between the halves of the loaf in my hands.

°At a poultry market, a woman becomes upset when a chicken is brought to her with its head cut off. An argument ensues. "I want the chicken whole!" The clerk kills another chicken, leaves its head intact. The customer is satisfied. We wonder about exotic rituals: fresh kills, feathers, blood. Ancient words, rhythmic movement.

Baking hair bread, sewing together meat parts, cradling a bone doll. They smell. They smell BAD. What is the fascination?

UH-OH, or LUCK'S EDGE, or HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION

Victor Young and Julie Rochlin

... I used to build radios and electronic stuff when I was a kid, I was really, all the time building something. Then one day I saw in this catalogue, "Build your own geiger counter. Detect radiation anywhere." That was for me. No radiation loose anywhere. So I sent away and the tube came, the detection tube, and it's really a three thousand volt power supply. I'm ten years old and that was like slightly grounded, but I'd give it a try. So what I remember doing was working on it, plugging it in, testing it, unplugging it, working on it until one time the wire on the anode broke off, carrying the three thousand volts to the tube. And I decided, I always strip wire with my teeth, and I realized much too late that I had not unplugged it. Here the instance was very similar with the light except is closed down very fast and I was on the ground, and even today sometimes this tooth right here gives real strange shooting pains.

... So we went to Calistoga in California, this was a big hot springs area, wine country, and we had to make reservations for the mud baths and reservations for dinner and reservations for breakfast, and we passed a McDonald's on the way in and I swear I saw you gotta make reservations for a hamburger. So we were pretty bummed out in

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INTERVIEW: PAUL MILLER TALKS LANGUAGE WITH GARY DUEHR

(Gary Duehr is the director of Theater S., which recently presented an experimental version of Ibsen's Ghosts at Mass. College of Art. Theater S. has also presented LIVE TV, Net and Thief at Mobius, Project Arts Center and other locations in the Boston area.)

- PM: You mentioned that you came out of the third generation of the Bauhaus tradition, and then I've been thinking a lot about that, trying to figure out, what does that have to do with your use of words? and your use of text? I was wondering if you could give me some of your history with text-pieces.
- GD: Well, I'd say about a year and a half, two years ago -- you try to figure out what's your unique vocabulary, or what you should be concentrating on -- and I hit on something that was pretty obvious, the fact that I was a writer at heart, I was a writer before I was any-else. So, that in the performances I made or whatever I did otherwise, it would be interesting to try to focus on writing, on language. There's always been writing in the things, and for awhile I tried to concentrate on other, visual kinds of things, and then I decided no, just let writing take over, or let the text take over.
- PM: Or just collaborate with people.
- GD: Or let somebody else do the work! (Laughter) Right, I don't do anything, I collaborate with dead people, it's easy! But collaboration became more and more and more and more important. With Ghosts, you wouldn't necessarily come away from that thinking it was a piece about language, or that the text was the most important thing. You'd probably say, oh, visual stuff, images, that was important, and then you would say, well, the music was interesting, and that was important, and then the text would be maybe third somewhere. No, you wouldn't think in a way it was heavy with text. LIVE TV, would say, that was all about text, I mean that was pretty dense.
- PM: Yeah, but you think that in Ghosts the audience didn't perceive it as being a piece about language? My general perception was that that piece was so laden down with text at some points as to be . . .
- GD: Oh really? All that shouting?
- PM: Yeah, a lot of shouting, and just layers and layers of images, that I felt like the only way I could make sense out of what you just said would be to think that a lot of the language in that was cyclical, and that there was no focus on particular statements much of the time, it being so repetitive. It's not the same thing as LIVE TV, where you really had to listen to each word to understand the content of the piece.
- GD: I guess, for me, words are so charged, that I don't need much more than words. I mean, talking about the history of my use of text, I keep filling them out with other things more and more. I mean, it's enough to me to, like in Thief, lie down and read on the floor, I'm a pretty happy individual.
- PM: Just lying down and reading on the floor.
- GD: That's right. You know, in a lot a pieces I've done there's somebody reading. And that's not a very emotionally charged moment. It usually looks like, no matter what they say, it's like somebody's reading. And there's other things, like light and music, that carry emotion, but just language or reading seem like things that don't hit you in the stomach.
- PM: But for you, words are emotionally charged. Watching someone read a text on stage, just by itself is an emotional experience.
- GD: I think so. Yeah. But maybe other things are more, it's more emotional for me to have light enter into it, and other elements enter into it too. I mean, let's call it the body. Let's say the act of reading is the head, that's the head acting up there.
- PM: Yeah, maybe the sound or the light is at the heart.
- GD: I would say, in terms of where things have been and where they're going, they're headed from the head down to the rest of the body, they keep getting richer in terms of emotional things.
- PM: What really interests me is the way that everything from your phone machine to the Ghosts sounds is very clear.
- GD: You mean the way I talk? People from the Midwest all talk that way.
- PM: Very clearly. No, I don't believe that! (Laughter)
- GD: Regional accent. It Is A Regional Accent.
- PM: No, I can't quite believe that story, Gary. Because again, you mentioned the Bauhaus, and you said, one of the tenets of the Bauhaus was that you take a process or a tool, or some-

thing like photography or theater, words or language, and you explore its weaknesses. So I started thinking, OK, it's probably, spoken language is probably very difficult to enunciate clearly, it's probably easiest, uh, I'll start all over again. The weakest element of spoken language is probably consistency.

GD: What do you mean?

PM: My feeling is that, in everyday spoken language, the natural evolution of words, of language is to get smeared and be unclear --

GD: Oh well, that's the emotional weight too. I think if you say words clearly it does two things: it removes the emotion --

PM: It does remove the emotion?

GD: Yeah, I mean, where's the emotion come from when you're talking? Tone of voice, speed, rate. So If You Talk Clearly In This Kind Of Voice, you heighten it, you elevate it. You think about the words themselves, you're not just thinking about what you're saying anymore. So that if I talk Like This, then all of a sudden you're listening to Each Individual Word, and thinking about individual words.

PM: But I'm also thinking Gary has some speech problem (laughter), Gary has some obsession with clarity, I mean clarity is an emotional experience.

GD: Yeah, but maybe it's just trying to make the words clear themselves. I think, it's complex, but the words can do it by themselves. That's part of that thought I was saying before. For me, the words can do it by themselves. It's like, just say the words clearly. And that's all you need to do. That's enough, that's emotional enough, that's everything enough. Anyway, why do I talk, or make other people talk that way? I think that it is to make people think about the language itself, the vehicle, and not just what is being said.

PM: One thing about Ghosts was that there were a lot of levels in, not only dynamic, but in dramatic values, everything from playing ordinary, clear speech to --

GD: Hysteria.

PM: Yeah, hyper-dramatic reading, and it reminded me of Baroque music, in that it was terraced emotionality.

GD: What do you mean? Terrorist?

PM: I'm thinking of Baroque music, where because of the limits of the instruments, they couldn't make gradual dynamic changes, so they had to pick a level and stay there, and that kind of thinking about structure, I think, is something you're into. I think you like to use levels and remain on constant levels for awhile.

GD: You're right, I think. I never thought about that. But that's true, I think there's always this static quality. Even in Ghosts, all the dynamic plot, everything was reduced to certain static levels and to textures. I mean that's conscious, I never thought of it as Baroque instruments before.

PM: Staying on constant levels and introducing long, long phrasing into it.

GD: So, yeah, I guess that's pretty conscious. It's like, how do you make things? And in my head . . . the only thing I try to think about consciously is making something interesting. And I mean interesting in the best sense of the word, to make an interesting object. So I may think about strategies of doing that, whatever that takes, or whatever goes into it, but the furthest thing from my mind is what that means, either to myself or to the audience. It's like letting that take care of itself. When you write a poem, you don't sit down and say "I'm going to write a poem about grief, I'm going to write a poem about sadness, " you sit down and you say, "Hmm, I'm going to try to make an interesting poem." I would say that's something that's important to the way I work, that I focus on making an interesting thing, and let the emotional work take care of itself, and I let the meaning take care of itself. It's like in my head, I see things like a little building, before the sides are put on. A definite framework and it's a solid structure, and all the meanings co-exist there and intersect in lots of different ways, and the idea is to make it as complex and resonant as possible, because the more complexities you have, the more resonances you have. Why not hit the intellect, emotion, and why not hit everything you can at once, and make it as resonant as you can with meanings?

PM: I can really understand this, to make as many connections as possible, that's what I usually say to people when I'm trying to describe my working process. In a sense it's kind of common, but it sounds very dry, very calculated.

GD: But you discover them, that's the thing, though.

PM: Yeah, it's the process of discovery, you're making your own road, and in a sense you're building brick by brick to get to someplace, and the process of building is just a little bit ahead of maybe your intellectual understanding, or your emotional edification or whatever.

GD: The other thing I would say is that, dense as they may get, and Ghosts is the densest thing that I've dealt with, I would say the idea is to expose all these layers of connections and to lay them bare, so that people can look at them and enter into it. It's like making an object that's very clear, that I would enjoy, but it's also clearly meant for other people to look at. I'm not trying to make things that are difficult or baffling or so complex that people are put off by them.

PM: My way of justifying density in pieces is to say that I'm not trying to make a simple idea complex, to baffle; I'm making a very complex idea as simple as possible.

GD: Well, that's the idea. And in fact, I would be teaching students poetry -- not teaching them poetry, we'd be looking at poetry. I'd try to look at their poems as objects, but they would always, very typically of poetry class for beginning students, say "Why'd he have to make this poem so hard to understand?" You know, "Why couldn't he just say what he meant?" And the answer is, "Well, because life is very complex, and these are very complex thoughts and feelings he's having, and he's trying to make them as absolutely clear as he can, and not lose any of the resonances and complexities." It's easy for them to say, I'm Happy, but what if he's not that happy?

PM: What if he's kinda happy? What if he's happy and sad at the same time (laughter)?

GD: What if he thinks he's happy and he's really not? What if he's secretly happy?

---

UH-OH

Calistoga, it was like reservation land. We go up to the room in the bed and breakfast and there's this little pamphlet and Leni opens it up and it says you are entitled to a free glass of wine, you are entitled to a muffin with breakfast, you are entitled to talk to us if there's something wrong with your room, you are entitled to this, and you are entitled ... So Leni is like in her grungy sweatshirt and dungarees and she makes this very feminine bow and she says "Welcome to the land of entitlement."

... Just before we got to Copper Harbor, we stopped at Pop's rock shop. It was just this little ... it was actually his garage. But we rode up on the bike, and got off, and took off our helmets, and Pop came out and said, "I hope you're finding what you're looking for. I started riding in 1914," and I thought that was pretty interesting, and he said, "Yeah, I had three Indians, and a Harley and that Suzuki over there, and I just turned 91 last month, and I said it's time to stop riding. My wife and my daughter

were nagging me for ten years to stop riding. And I've never had an accident, but I turned 91 and I said, Pop, it's time to stop."

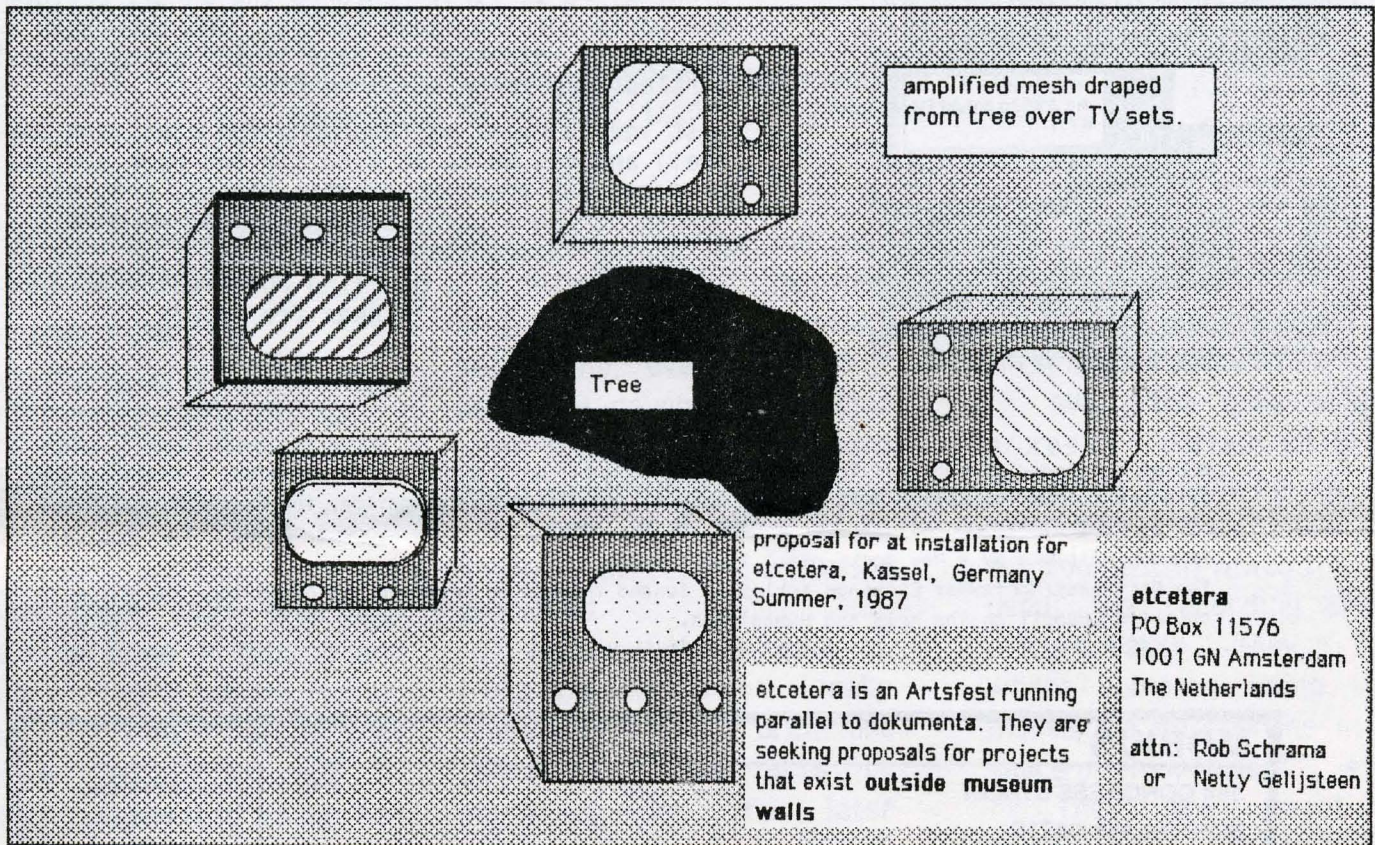
... we went up, straight up the length of Idaho. It's just this beautiful straight road with one or two farmhouses, and just rocky ridges all the way, past the Cafe, and flying into Eastport and across to Yahk. Doc and Myra's Cafe is in Yahk, and the Howling Dog Saloon, and the customs house. Sunday afternoon everybody in town sits at the customs house and watches everybody drive across the border. We got into Doc and Myra's and got into a conversation with a guy who said there was a Yaak in Idaho spelled Y-A-A-K, the Yahk in Canada being Y-A-H-K, and the reason that was done, it was instigated by the border people themselves, because it's such a big border there, they can't really control people crossing, but when they find somebody whose nationality they're not really sure of, they ask him to spell Yahk, and if he spells it wrong, they send him back across the border.

... It had been like 21 days coming home of rain. Every day rain, or fog, and it's getting to be pretty heavy duty, and we get back in the plains, and we're trying to outrun a storm, and the other things that's happening in the plains that there's this curious lack of vegetables and fruits. I don't know why, but there's just nothing. But everyplace you stop at advertises salad bar, and what that means is a lot of pickled things, and a lot of jello. Particularly green jello. I got the idea that Leni was getting a little bit unhappy with things when she turned to me in the restaurant and said to me if I see another blob of green jello, I think I'll puke.

Ghost Light  
Richard Lerman © 1986

Installation piece using many junked TV sets as a light source.

TV sets are placed around a tree, propped on their backs pointing towards top of tree.



Installation is covered with a thin mesh, which is heavily amplified. Piece begins at sunset. Audience is encouraged to bring picnic dinner. As dusk becomes nightfall, many insects will be attracted to the flickerings, and will collide with screen/mesh. These collisions will be heard over loudspeakers. Ambient light in the surroundings must be very low. Up to 25 junk TV's ought to be used.

Mesh can be made from old window screens, woven metal mesh, mosquito nets, & other materials and is draped over TV sets from the tree,

Richard Lerman

at MOBIUS  
354 Congress St.  
Boston, MA 02210  
542-7416

photodraw

**VISUAL  
SOUND**

Installations:  
Jan. 28 - Feb. 1  
noon - 5 PM

performances:  
Jan. 28, 30 & Feb. 1  
8 PM

February 1  
performance  
with  
David  
Moss

photo: R. Ritter for  
Brattleboro Museum

WATCH THIS SPACE. The Mobius Board of Directors is throwing our Second Annual (Soon-To-Be-Already-Wildly-Successful) FUNDRAISING PARTY on March 15, 1985. The theme for the party is Ides of March/Rites of Spring. Like last year's bash, this will be a performance of a party -- with music, dancing, food, and video. You'll purchase your roles and lines for the evening ahead of time -- during the evening, we'll first rehearse the party, perform the party for the video cameras, and then have a cast party watching the tape of the party we just partied. Are you with us so far?

Last year's event was enormous fun (just ask anyone!) and now we're looking for one-page scripts or scenarios from you (that's right). What might happen during a party called Ides of March/Rites of Spring? We're planning to have 2-3 main roles, and any number of supporting roles and walk-ons, per scenario. So let's hear from you!

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BOSTON, MA 02210

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