



Michel Redolfi supplied the music, which was piped into Dartmouth's Olympic-sized pool. GLOBE PHOTO BY JOHN BLANDING

## Immersed in the music

### A rare concert for Dartmouth

By Brad Pokorny  
Globe Staff

HANOVER, N.H. — First, there was the four-foot-wide vinyl jellyfish, which floated in the center of the pool, dangling tentacles made of broken mirrors and glow-in-the-dark tape, while people swam and floated around it in Dartmouth College's Olympic-sized pool.

Then, there was the sweeping entrance of composer Michel Redolfi himself, who conducted the underwater event — a concert, actually — wearing purple bikini swimming trunks.

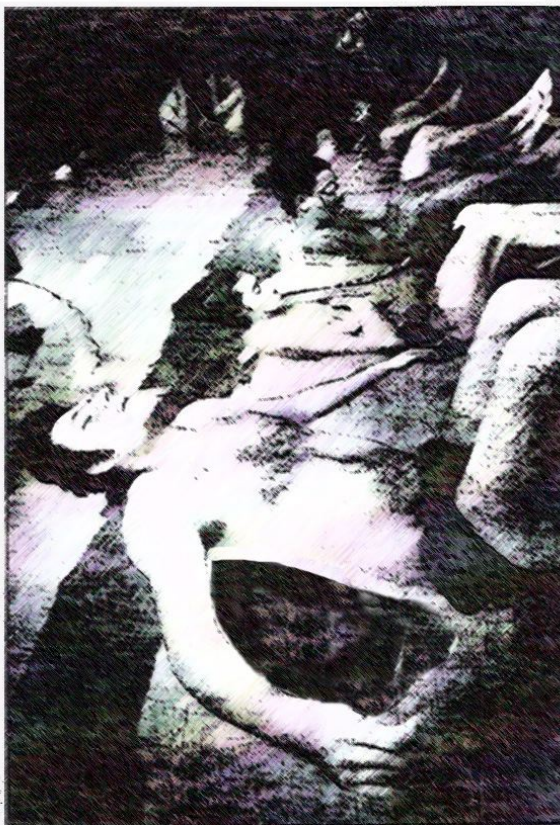
And then there were the concertgoers, who drifted and dived and paddled and frolicked and snorkeled in the pool's ultrawarm water in a state that, for some, approached womb-like bliss.

Finally, there was the music, which was piped into the submerged part of the pool, sounding something like an off-key, warbling sound track to an outer-space movie performed in a small bathroom with the sink running. The music could be heard only if the listener's head was in the water.

The evening at Dartmouth's pool marked the East Coast debut of Redolfi's "Sonic Waters." The 30-year-old French-born composer views the underwater symphonies as an experiment on frontiers of music. He says his aim is to bring modern music, which he feels is viewed as harsh and sterile by the average concertgoer, back into some degree of popularity.

As an event, the concert drew wide interest. The 150 tickets for each of the two concerts he gave Tuesday sold out in the first few hours of sale a week and a half ago. "We could have sold out eight more concerts," said Jon Appleton, a Dartmouth professor of art and

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Concertgoers lay back and listen to the music. GLOBE PHOTO BY JOHN BLANDING



Natasha Stanfill listens to the music.

GLOBE PHOTO BY JOHN BLANDING

## Listeners immersed in the music

### ■ MUSIC

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technology who sponsored Redolfi's concerts. They were the second of their kind to be given in the United States. The first was given last summer in the Pacific Ocean near San Diego.

But to most of the audience, Tuesday evening was an enjoyable lark, a way to escape the subfreezing New Hampshire winter outside by lounging in a pool heated to 93 degrees, just below body temperature.

"I like it. It's weird," said 13-year-old Josh Greenberg of Norwich, Vt. "I like the warm water."

A few, however, viewed the event as a degradation of the art of music. "I think it's ghastly," said an area resident who asked not to be named. "The music is worthless. And the idea of listening to it in a swimming pool is even more nonsense."

But Redolfi, who teaches at the University of California at San Diego, is quite serious about the whole thing, although he recognizes and approves of its amusement value. "It's a smooth transition from research in electronic music and trying to have a better relation with the public," Redolfi said in an interview before the concert Tuesday afternoon. "It's a continuation of the trend in the early 20th century that tried to shorten the distance between the composer, his music and the public."

The distance between the composer, his music and the public was indeed short Tuesday night. Redolfi swam in and among his listeners as they floated in the pool, immersed in sound. Out of the pool,

the music could be heard only as a faint strain of beeps and whistles that carried above the spashing and breathing.

And most of the people loved the experience.

"It's great," said Martha Richards, a 22-year-old Hanover resident. "I think they ought to put one in everybody's bathtub."

"It makes you feel like you are part of the water," said Robert Hill, a Dartmouth College student from Rutland, Vt. "You feel you like you could stay under water without breathing."

"I love it," said Mike Whiting, a Dartmouth sophomore who normally uses the pool for practice on the swim team. "I wish we could get their speaker in here for swim practice."

Redolfi used three special low-voltage underwater speakers he designed with the help of a US Navy engineer to pipe the music directly into the water. He said several unusual properties of underwater listening combine to give it a unique sound.

"The sound waves go through the water and though your skin like the skin doesn't exist, because the skin is 80 percent water," Re-

dolfi said. "So it bypasses your eardrum and gets right to your bones. So the head transmits the sound to the inner ear directly. So we have a pure signal going directly to the brain through the nerve."

This makes the sound seem to surround and engulf the listener, Redolfi said. It also means the sound comes from all directions. It is not stereophonic. He said Navy engineers have studied underwater sound and known of these properties for years, but had never considered applying them.

"It's something that's good for the body. It's very sensual," he said. "The idea of the concert is to let people play with the water and sound and to let people do very personal things, personal movements."

Redolfi received a swimming ovation at the end of the concert. He said he plans to continue to improve and refine the experience until the possibilities for submarine music are exhausted. "I'm not doing this just for provocation," he said, suggesting the future of "Sonic Waters" could be bright.

"There are more swimming pools in the country than concert halls," he said.

## THE BOSTON GLOBE

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