

Concert is half a success

By LAWRENCE B. JOHNSON

Any new music concert is a long-shot adventure. If half the bill of fare proves rewarding, you can consider your investment of time and ticket price repaid.

That's about how the chips fell Monday night at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, where the Wisconsin Contemporary Music Forum presented works by seven composers with state connections.

The evening was conveniently divided into good news and bad news; but nowhere was that division indicated on the printed program, so the few of us in attendance remained to suffer the second half.

Marion Verhaalen's "Three Songs from The Prairie Woman," by far the most conservative offering, and certainly the least pretentious, proved the most imaginative and compelling by a wide measure.

Based on poems by Tom Montag, this portrait of American pioneer life actually includes six songs, with a seventh yet to be written. It's too bad soprano Carolyn Fons was limited to just three parts; her sensitive, powerfully focused singing, handily supported by pianist Julia Freeman, left a strong craving for more.

The intoxicating wonder inspired by the film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" touched this listener again in Gregory Fish's electronic tape piece called "Cynthia's Poem." Between its mind-

shaking, low-register storms and sparkling lyric flights, Fish's music worked an irresistible charm.

More bizarre, more brilliant and far funnier was "The Progression of the Wind" for electronic tape and amplified viola, by Sigmund Snopek III. Jon Stoll turned in a bravura solo performance, pitting his supercharged instrument against a barrage of tape effects with Snopek at the controls.

What followed intermission ranged from the trivial to the . . . come to think of it, the whole second half wallowed in trivia:

August Wagner's kinky cocktail music for piano titled "Encore Piece: A Little Minor Blues"; John Downey's repetitive bleatings for electronic tape called "Afternoon's Purple"; Israel Kremen's Piano Sonata (warmed-over Bartok); and Burt Levy's "Segments" for jazz trio, actually composed by a committee (he said) and just that successful.