

STEVE LAKE

MELODY MAKER

The Ritual Theatre is an amalgam of three musicians - Clive Bell, Colin Wood and Billy Lee Currie - three experimental actors - John Attenborough, Rosalind Davies and Hilton McRae - and creator, designer, director Barry Edwards. Their concert at London's ICA on Wednesday began in near darkness with all six group members positioned around the perimeter of the low white stage, rattling gourds and maracas, then spasmodically breaking into werewolf wailing in the best Lugosi tradition.

Bell, a founder member of Henry Cow, blew frenetic wooden flute, and Currie and Wood sawed across their principal instruments (viola and cello, respectively). Wood often playing near the bridge for all sorts of acoustic weirdnesses. As the lights rose the actors moved one by one to the stage centre and began to enact an extraordinary mime-dance-cum-group-grope, combining mannered theatrics with screams, orgasmic sighs and Neanderthal grunts - communicating physically with each other and verbally and visually with the musicians.

This performance was much more than a theatrical exercise with musical backing. The degree of integration so intense that it merited new categorisation; I suppose the fashionable term 'music theatre' is loosely appropriate. Although the Ritual Theatre is very much an ensemble effort, special mention must be made of Rosalind Davies, whose menacingly sensual performance, full of unstated tension, contributed to a powerful, primeval experience.