

The New York Times

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1989

Review/Music

Duo's Individual Statements

By PETER WATROUS

Bob Ostertag's first show at the Knitting Factory on Wednesday night, featuring the saxophonist John Zorn, opened with an improvised duet that sounded less like a conversation than a set of statements, some of which agreed, some of which were contradictory. By the end of the set, the two had argued heatedly, come to some similar conclusions and created a series of intense improvisations.

Wednesday's show was Mr. Ostertag's first performance under his own name in eight years; at one time a regular collaborator on the downtown scene, Mr. Ostertag recently spent time as a journalist. For the show, he manipulated recorded sounds of Mr. Zorn's with a sampling keyboard (which allowed him to play the sounds back at whatever pitch he wanted), clothing them in noise, turning them into whistling sounds and occasionally leaving them as is. One piece had Mr. Zorn playing be-bop lines against a repeated, rhythmically sharpened line of his own, coming from Mr. Ostertag.

Mr. Ostertag was in good humor, and on the opening piece he lowered the pitch of sounds Mr. Zorn had made by playing his instruments in water, transforming them into the intestinal grumblings of a Hollywood monster. The audience laughed, and

Mr. Zorn honked and screeched.

From there the two created a series of tangentially related sounds. Mr. Ostertag repeated the sound of water burbling, over and over. Mr. Zorn played scales. Mr. Ostertag used something that sounded like bugs buzzing at night. Mr. Zorn screeched, while Mr. Ostertag made more intestinal sounds. Mr. Zorn played more scales, a stiff be-boop line, a honk and a squeal. At other places, Mr. Ostertag took the idea further, poking fun at Mr. Zorn by repeating some of his words over and over, turning them into a riff. Then Mr. Zorn and Mr. Ostertag delved into a staccato section that had all the excitement of a funk band, and had the audience cheering.