

THE REHEARSAL STUDIO

A PLACE TO EXERCISE IDEAS BEFORE WRITING ABOUT THEM WITH GREATER DISCIPLINE.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

A Disappointing All-Premiere Program from Earplay

Last night in the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theatre, Earplay continued its 34th season, entitled *Desire and Idea*, with the second of its three programs, entitled *Sound and Shadow*. Conductor Mary Chun was able to take the night off, since none of the selections required more than four performers. All six pieces on the program were being given a premiere performance of one sort or another.

Under the circumstances, it was inevitable that the results of this programming would be mixed. Most satisfying was probably Taiwanese composer Yu-Hsin Chang's "Frozen Sparkles," a world premiere performance of a composition written on an Earplay commission. While neither the title nor the composer's notes for the program book conveyed very much, the relatively brief composition was sustained by a thoroughly engaging flow of eccentric rhythmic patterns, sustained through the reverberant qualities of lower-register instruments: bass clarinet (played by Peter Josheff) and viola (Ellen Ruth Rose). The composer was apparently inspired by a particular approach to meditation, but this was imaginative writing that did not require any background knowledge for deep appreciation.

Sadly, this one composition pretty much towered over all of the other offerings on the program. Most disappointing was probably the performance of the winner of the 2018 Earplay Donald Aird Composers Competition. The composer was A. J. McCaffrey, and his winning entry was entitled "Here Come the Waterworks." This piece also saw Rose on viola, this time accompanied at the piano by Brenda Tom.

The composer's notes for the program book stated, "I was not interested in depicting a traumatic or tragic event, but rather the rituals and gestures that we enact in order to go through stressful or difficult emotions." To paraphrase a remark that Igor Stravinsky once made on television, we could do with the composer declining to tell us more in favor of having the musicians play us more. Sadly, what *was* played seemed to have as little of substance to say as the composer did.

STEPHEN SMOLIAR



The author's construction of his reality of self!

ABOUT ME

STEPHEN SMOLIAR

Still trying to "liberate the mind from fear, superstition and pettiness."

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

RELATED LINKS

[Al Jazeera English](#)

[Archives from Examiner.com](#)

[Beyond Rehearsal](#)

[Civic Center](#)

[Reflections Beyond Technology \(my old blog\)](#)

[San Francisco Conservatory of Music](#)

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2019 (242)

▼ April (37)

My first composition teacher, sadly now deceased, used to emphasize two cardinal sins in the efforts of his students. One was called “slimy chromaticism.” The other involved moving around with little sense of direction, a practice that he liked to call “noodling.” In “Here Come the Waterworks” it was hard to find a phrase that refrained from such noodling, while McCaffrey’s decision to work with microtones resulted in chromatics that were even slimier than my composition teacher would have imagined. These days it is relatively easy to find composers with imaginative approaches to using such microtones, but there was nothing imaginative in McCaffrey’s technique. The same could be said of the 1994 microtonal trio by German composer Carola Bauckholt, being given its United States premiere performance.

Tom also gave a solo performance of another world premiere, “Feel” by Australian composer Claire Jordan. To some extent this recalled the best-forgotten days of Third Stream Jazz, when composers that were well-versed in serial techniques thought it would be hip to jam with some of the more adventurous jazz combos. To paraphrase the joke about monorails, Third Stream was an idea of the future whose time quickly passed; but “Feel” gave the disappointing impression that, armed with new techniques such as minimalism, it was preparing to rise again.

The entire program was framed by two works by the featured composer of the season, Tristan Murail. In the opening selection, the United States premiere of “Les Ruines circulaire” (circular ruins), Murail attempted to establish a self-referential structure around a duo for clarinet (Josheff) and violin (Terrie Baune); but his verbal description emerged as far more engaging than the music he was describing. At the other end of the program, “Garrigue” came closest to conveying a sense of jamming with its quartet of bass flute (Tod Brody), viola (Julie Michael), cello (Thalia Moore), and percussion (Kevin Neuhoff). Whether the music had anything to do with the Mediterranean plant life described in the program book (with one very amusing misspelling about “flagrant plants”) was left as an exercise for the listener; but the overall effect was a bit lame in the wake of Chin’s stimulating rhythms from the preceding work on the program.

POSTED BY STEPHEN SMOLIAR AT 7:11 AM 

LABELS: CHAMBER MUSIC, JAZZ, KEYBOARD MUSIC, MUSIC

NO COMMENTS:

Post a Comment

SFP Gift Concert to Present
Soprano Sarah Shafer
ECM Releases Bill Frisell’s
Latest Album
The Bleeding Edge: 4/15/2019
Musical Love Stories Told by
Ensemble Caprice
RPF Releases Latest Boom Tic
Boom Album
Deborah Voigt to Conclude SFP
Vocal Series
Scarfe’s groupmuse Concerts
through May, 2019
Oratorio at its Most Dramatic
from PBO
Old First Concerts: May, 2019
Boreyko’s Refreshing
Introduction to Zemlinsky
Tetzlaff-Tetzlaff-Vogt to Return
to SFP
Anticipating the 2019–2020
SFP Season
Center for New Music: May,
2019
Weinberg’s Preludes that
Rostropovich Rejected
Choices for April 28, 2019
Handel’s Joseph Oratorio
Released on CD
A Disappointing All-Premiere
Program from Earplay
Opus Arte Begins its Ashton
“Collection”
The Bleeding Edge: 4/8/2019
Elegantly Expressive Duo
Recital at Davies
Pepe Romero to Conclude
Dynamite Guitars Season
Over the Top with Lamplighters’
G&S++
Choices for April 26, 2019