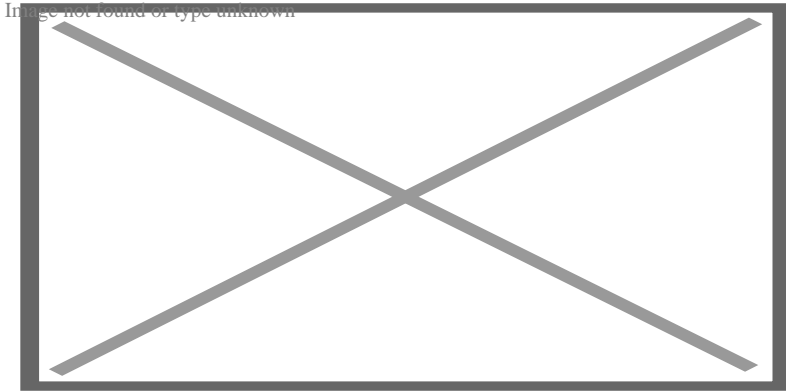


Other Minds Festival: OM 17: Panel Discussion & Concert 3, 5 of 6



Identifier

OMF.2012.03.03.c1.E

Description

The third and final concert of the 17th Other Minds Festival of New Music (OM 17) began with a panel discussion with some of the composers and performers featured in the night's concert, held on March 3 2012. Joining moderator Charles Amirhanian were composers Tyshawn Sorey, Lotta Wennäkoski, John Kennedy and Ken Ueno, as well as video artist Johnny Dekam. Tyshawn Sorey talks about his very early interest in becoming a musician and how his style of playing has been influenced by his exposure, through his parents large record collection, to a wide variety of musical genres and world music traditions. He also discusses his extensive use of various objects as percussion instruments. Lotta Wennäkoski talks about her work "Nosztalgiaim," which was to be the opening work of the concert, and which was inspired by the sound of a hurdy-gurdy and two Hungarian folk songs. John Kennedy, who was the featured conductor for Wennäkoski's work, mentions his great respect for her skill and expresses some regret that many of her works have yet to be heard in the United States. Kennedy also provides some insight into his own two compositions scheduled for this concert, which features recycled objects used as percussion instruments, some of which often get damaged during performance. Ken Ueno then relates how his musical compositions are often directly tied to the individual talents and techniques of specific musicians. For the piece featured in this concert, "Peradam", Kennedy highlighted the micortonal virtuosity of the Del Sol String Quartet, as well as the extended vocal techniques of violist, Charlton Lee. Johnny Dekam, who provided the live video for "Peradam," describes how his early interest in traditional painting quickly morphed into an expertise with video art and his recent collaborations with such well established pop music acts as Thomas Dolby.

Nosztalgiaim:

The word nostalgia usually refers to longing for something that is gone. So does the work "Nosztalgiaim" ("my nostalgias" in Hungarian). An important part of my personal history is a period that I spent in Budapest in the late 1980's, studying violin, music theory and folk music.

However, I am not trying to discover the Tiszta forrás (pure springs) that Béla Bartók did. I would rather call my sources "dirty"—everything one sees and hears is always filtered through one's own personality. Thus the reference, the background of “Nosztalgiaim” is not exactly Hungarian folk music, but my own selective interpretation of it. The things I hear in it, the things I want to hear, the things I happen to hear. The things I remember and the ones I choose to remember.

“Nosztalgiaim” was commissioned by the Finnish Kalevala Society and premiered by Avanti! chamber orchestra in February 2007 in Helsinki. The musical material refers to two Hungarian folk songs, “Édesanyám” and “Amott egy kis patak”. - Lotta Wennäkoski

Note: Lotta Wennäkoski and “Nosztalgiaim” are presented with support from the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation and the Finlandia Foundation.

First Deconstruction (in Plastic):

Island in Time:

My works heard tonight are my two homages to John Cage, perhaps appropriate for Other Minds in John's centenary year. “First Deconstruction (in Plastic),” composed in 2005, is a 21st Century homage to the found-object percussion music and series of “constructions” made by Cage about 50 years ago, and the title alludes to his “First Construction (in Metal).”

Today, plastic is everywhere, with shopping bags and packing material such as Styrofoam “peanuts” seen in remote wilderness areas, carried by winds and tides. It is an ubiquitous material that depending on its type, decomposes slowly if at all.

The sound properties of plastics vary in quality, and one of the challenges of this piece is for the performers to find plastics that make the most interesting sounds and are durable enough for the work – and to recycle them as music. Each player has a set of five plastic “drums” (joint compound buckets to yogurt containers), as well as scraped plastic (such as salad bar boxes scraped with combs), and plastic shakers (corrugated water bottles filled with plastic beads). The work centers on a rhythmic deconstruction of the unit of five. The central theme, in 5/8 meter, is in 16th note values: 4+3+2+1. This is then perverted every which way.

“Island in Time” was composed in the past year, and like much of my work, focuses on strategies for the navigation of musical time. Cage sometimes spoke of how time (or “duration”) was the most fundamental or important parameter of music, because it was the only parameter which existed in silence. And temporal organization, like equal temperament, generally continues to assume a kind of orthodoxy in compositional practice. But at sea, one might travel with motor or by whatever wind and current comes along.

This piece uses four types of musical motion: in relation to a clock, in relation to measured “timespace” on the page, in relation to a shared tempo (“in ensemble”), and in relation to individual intuition (“free pulse”, with no clock). Their interplay over the full duration or timeframe of the work creates pockets of silences – islands in time – landings where sound and space are free. - John Kennedy

Note: “Island in Time” was commissioned by Other Minds with support from Mrs. Ralph I. Dorfman.

Improvisations for Percussion:

Also includes piano

Peradam:

In a quest to discover sounds that speak to me on that level, I often conduct tests on instruments for which I am composing. These independent tests are augmented by what I learn through intense collaborations with performers for whom I am composing. Many of my works derive their structural aspects from considerations of the special instrumental skills of the performers with whom I collaborate, in a manner I term “person-specific.” “Peradam” is person-specific for the Del Sol String Quartet. Having heard them play a number of times, I was particularly inspired by the fact that all the members can sing and play beautifully, as well as the fact that they are whole-heartedly invested in the performance of microtones (which is important to me since my harmonic world mixes equal tempered notes, quarter-tones, justly intoned notes, and microtonal harmonies derived from formant analysis of sung vowels). These aspects are prominently featured throughout my piece.

The most person-specific aspect of this piece is dedicated to what the violist, Charlton, can do. He can throat sing. As a composer who lives a double life as a vocalist specializing in extended techniques including throat singing, I was blown away when Charlton showed me he could throat sing. It was at that moment that I knew I had to write a piece for him and the Del Sols!

The title of my piece, “Peradam,” refers to a rare mythical diamond-like stone that is the invention of René Daumal and appears in his novel, “Mount Analogue.” The novel is an allegorical spiritual quest in the guise of an alpine ascent. In Daumal’s novel, peradam is found on the slopes of Mount Analogue and appears to whomever “seeks it with sincere desire...it reveals itself by its sudden sparkle, like that of dewdrops.” Peradam is a metaphor for a rare, beautiful, natural phenomenon, an object that stands for discoveries we can attain over a lifetime of searching for them...

One additional feature that makes the premiere of this piece special is having the opportunity to collaborate again with the video artist, Johnny Dekam. Years ago, he created an interactive video for the premiere of my saxophone and electronics piece, whatWALL?, at the Duderstadt Center at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. It’s inspiring to me that he not only has the talent and taste to create stunning visual works, but he also has the skill to create custom software which interacts with parameters controlled by live musical input. The software helps make each performance unique: It privileges the live experience, a quality that resonates fully with my aesthetic. - Ken Ueno

Note: “Peradam” was commissioned by Other Minds with support from the San Francisco Foundation, the Jebediah Foundation, Mrs. Ralph I. Dorfman, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts.

Musical Selections

[improvisations, for percussion and piano] (27:41) / Tyshawn Sorey

Artists

Other Minds Festival (features)
Sorey, Tyshawn, 1980- (features)