

Other Minds Festival: OM 19: Panel Discussion and Concert 2 (Mar. 1, 2014), 4 of 6



Identifier

OMF.2014.03.01.c2.D

Description

The second, concluding, concert of the 19th Other Minds Festival of New Music (OM 19) was held on March 1, 2014 in the newly inaugurated SFJazz Center in San Francisco. The evening's program included a mix of electronic, jazz, and piano music with a little bit of African parrots added for spice. The program begins with Charles Celeste Hutchins, a young, California-born, but now London based, composer and computer programmer, who performs a computer music piece that relies on the composer drawing cloud shapes and then assigning sonic forms to them. John Schott then performs three recent compositions with his jazz group, The Actual Trio. Violinist and composer Wendy Reid then delights with a wonderfully inventive work that features what might have been the star performer of the night, Lulu, an African Grey Parrot and her blue parrotlet partners, whose recorded vocals are artfully mixed into a broader electro-acoustic cross-species conversation. Following the intermission the concert continues with Myra Melford performing selections of her "Life Carries Me This Way" for solo piano. The Festival then concludes with Roscoe Mitchell, the pioneering free-jazz saxophonist and composer once more taking to the OM stage to perform the world premiere of his Other Minds commissioned work for bass saxophone quartet, "Nonaah."

Cloud Drawings

This piece is loosely based on Xenakis' UPIC system, but extending it to his description of screens for granular synthesis in *Formalised Music*. The program is written in SuperCollider and designed for improvising textures in real time. In it, I draw cloud shapes on the screen and assign waveforms to them. The cloud shapes act as tendency masks, limiting the frequencies of the granular clouds formed. The result is a glitchy exploration in one or two movements. Following the 'show us your screens' ethos of the live coding movement, this process is shared with the audience via video projection. A cursor at the top of the projection shows the progression of the piece through the different sound/shapes. It is also intended to allow the audience to experience the piece on both a sonic and a visual level. - Charles Hutchins

Carving, Scraping, Changing

I put this trio with John Hanes and Dan Seamans together two years ago, when I received an offer from the Actual Café in Oakland for a regular once a month gig. Over time we have played many of my older pieces, as well as free improv, country and blues chestnuts, jazz standards, requests from the audience, and the overture to Stravinsky's "Renard." My compositions are almost always a form of auto-didacticism, an attempt to teach myself something (rather than communicate something to an audience). I see this as a defect in myself as a composer, but time has not changed this tendency, and so I've come to accept it. Still, I apologize if you feel that I don't think about you. I do, I just don't know how to do it, how to write like your and my favorite composers do, with a "voice" that "speaks" to "you". Perhaps that is more present in me as a guitarist than as a composer. Recently I've been spending a lot of time thinking about the way Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and Lennie Tristano are able to generate such swing and momentum in their lines, and I suppose my recent music for the trio has been conceived in part to stimulate that research. I have found that writing jazz compositions with more or less conventional "chord changes" to be improvised on to be the hardest thing I've ever done as a composer. It is so easy for chord changes to sound tired and trite, reminding us of this or that period in jazz, each decade denoted by its harmonic addictions. On the other hand, chords can sound arbitrary and aimless, making musicians frustrated and angry. It's been fun for me to re-engage this problem of "generalized harmony," and I hope you will enjoy these pieces, and our work, such as it is. - John Schott

Tree Piece #55 "Lulu Variations"

"Tree Piece #55 'lulu variations'" is an environment in which live performers, being birds and humans, interact with their digital counterparts, attempting to create a sonically ambiguous landscape. The human performers play from a score of spatially notated timbral motives to be sounded freely within determined time frames. The various musical elements move independently coming together from time to time as a result of the inherent similarities of their timbral natures. This unforced relationship which exists between them is characteristic of the "Tree Pieces" as it exemplifies the inter-connection of all things in nature. All sonic elements, being birds, Buchla lightning, muted violin and trumpet, are presented equally in real time as digitally. An ideal performance is achieved when ambiguity is created between the real-time and digital elements as well as bird and instrument sounds, thus allowing for an 'intra' as well as an "inter-" dimensionality of the sonic relationships.

"Tree Pieces" is an on-going set of musical processes which attempt to reflect nature's manner of operations. Because the pattern or order of nature functions as a single process without division, contrary to the state of control in which there exists a duality (-one element commanding and the other obeying), control in the compositional process is removed by varying degrees from piece to piece.

The processes are contextual in nature thus allowing the performers to act according to the unpredictable conditions and variables which arise from within the musical continuity. In this way, the compositions attempt to reflect the inter-connection of all things (including ourselves) in nature. In performance, an attempt is made at a spontaneous unforced and unblocked growing of sound and silence in which emphasis is placed on formation rather than pre-established form, as in the building and shaping of cell-like units in living processes. This approach 'formation as process' parallels that of the artist Paul Klee whose writings have influenced my work. Klee believed that 'communication with nature remains the most essential condition' for the artist by the simple fact that he himself is part of nature.

- Wendy Reid

Life Carries Me This Way (Selections)

Don Reich was a close family friend and an artistic inspiration for as long as I can remember and this project, Life Carries Me This Way, evolved over the past few years. Don gave me a stack of drawings and paintings to consider. I put them up in my studio in Berkeley and let them speak to me for months and months.

Slowly, I began to hear my musical response, and to conceive the music for this recording. The bulk of it was composed during a 2-week residency at Ler Devagar (Read Slowly) a wonderful bookstore, gallery, and concert space in Lisbon, in June 2012.

The range of Don's work—the kinds of places and spaces it inhabits—seems to dovetail naturally with my own

tendency towards lyricism, abstraction and rhythmic mobility. I love his colorful and quirky sensibility; I feel his expression on a deep level, and in it, I recognize a kindred spirit.

As I continue to explore these artworks after recording the music for this record, I appreciate their aliveness, the quality of living beings to morph over time. I look forward to continuing my conversation with Don's work and revisiting the compositions his work inspired.- Myra Melford

Nonaah

I would like to start by giving a brief history of my composition "Nonaah." When I first imagined this work for solo alto saxophone I had no idea that this composition would take on a life of its own. In 1971 I started to write a set of five solo works for the alto saxophone. "Nonaah" is the first title in that series of five compositions. The solo work for alto saxophone includes both written and improvised sections and was completed in 1972. These solo versions can be heard on The Roscoe Mitchell Solo Saxophone Concerts, AECO Records (AECO CD# 16), and "Nonaah" (nessa ncd-9/10). Also recorded on nessa ncd-9/10 is a quartet version of "Nonaah" for four alto saxophones that includes both written and improvised sections, as well. After listening to the slow movement of the quartet for four alto saxophones, I was inspired to write a version of this work for string quartet. I spoke with a dear friend and composer Primous Fountain III about this idea, and he suggested that I write this composition for four cellos. I thought that this was a great idea as it kept the quartet with four of the same instrument and fulfilled my need to hear this work performed by strings. "Nonaah" quartet for four cellos was completed in 1979 and was premiered in Berkeley, California in the fall of 1980 by the 1750 Arch Ensemble.

The next composition in the "Nonaah" series was a trio for flute, bassoon and piano. This trio can be heard on the CD "Roscoe Mitchell: Four Compositions" (Lovely Music, LCD 2021).

In 2009 the American Composers Orchestra asked me if I had a composition that could be played on July 24, 2010 in the Miller Theatre at Columbia University in New York City. Since I had short notice, I decided to write "Nonaah" for chamber orchestra, which is a transcription of the trio for flute, bassoon and piano and is also a completely notated composition.

In the last part of 2012, a former student of mine, Jacob Zimmerman, asked me to present an entire evening of different versions of this composition that also included a premiere of a version of "Nonaah" for his thirteen-piece ensemble, Lawson, on June 7, 2013 at Benaroya Hall in Seattle, Washington. In 2013 I was asked by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra to premiere "Nonaah for Orchestra" on February 2014 in Glasgow, Scotland. Tonight's performance is the premiere of "Nonaah" quartet for four Bass Saxophones, which was commissioned by Other Minds with support from the Zellerbach Family Foundation, Harry Bernstein & Caren Meghreblian, and Tom Buckner. The composition is dedicated to Jim Newman, for many years the baritone saxophonist of the Junius Courtney Big Band. —Roscoe Mitchell

[Note: descriptions taken from Concert Program Guide]

Musical Selections

Tree Piece #55: Lulu variations, for African grey parrot, blue parrotlet, muted violin, trumpet, stone bowl of water, Buchla Lighting, and digital recording (2008) (15:16) / Wendy Reid

Artists

Other Minds Festival (features)

Reid, Wendy, 1951- (features)

Dambly, Tom (features)

Reid, Lulu (African Parrot) (features)