

Last Night in L.A.: New Voices

Monday Evening Concerts are alive and well and being given in the great acoustics of Zipper Hall! And if you don't know why that's important you're reading the wrong blog. Last night's program was the most stimulating in four or five years, stimulating because it presented works by six talented composers, works that were fresh and alive and downright good music.

One of the fresh approaches in the new MEC is to have a musician serve as curator for the program, selecting composers to bring to our attention and determining the works to support the rationale. In this first program **Steven Stucky** identified six composers in their early-to-middle careers, composers he felt we should know more about. As Stucky pointed out, the awards received and notable appearances given by these six point out they are certainly not "unknown artists"; instead, they are composers we should know much more about. Our local **Xtet** group provided the professional musicians for five of the six works (student violinists performed the sixth), and composer/conductor/professor **Donald Crockett** of USC and Xtet conducted four of the pieces.

The concert began with "Gran Turismo" (2005) by **Andrew Norman**, one of the twenty-year-olds, currently in Rome enjoying his **Rome Prize**. His bio lists 12 other prizes for composition. The work is a delightful perpetual motion for eight (8) violins. It was inspired by some paintings by Italian Futurists, particularly those of **Giacomo Balla** showing racing cars, paintings attempting to show movement and speed. A great start for a concert!

James Matheson wrote the next work, "Falling" (2000) for violin, cello and piano. Matheson did his graduate work (MFA, DMA) at Cornell, studying with Stucky and writing his doctoral thesis on Harbison's music. Also with awards aplenty (I'll stop saying this), Matheson received a commission from Carnegie for Upshaw's Perspectives series, a composition for soprano and chamber orchestra. "Falling", with a recurring motif of descending notes only to end in peaceful contemplation, acknowledges pre-modern musical forms while speaking in contemporary musical language. I could find only one clip of another work by Matheson on the Amazon search, and another clip on iTunes. I'd like to hear both his Carnegie commission and his work for the Albany Orchestra.

Sean Shepard, the other composer in his 20s, closed the first half with "Lumens" (2005) for violin, cello, flute/piccolo, clarinet, piano, and percussion, primarily tuned percussion. His **web site** gives three clips, which sound exactly as I remembered the performance, plus notes on the composition. I find it interesting that he would mention that some might object to the prettiness of the work, but that he persisted and was able to write something that might be so accessible.

A slightly older contingent had works in the second half of the concert, kicked off by "peal" (2000) by Philippe Bodin. This is a work for violin, cello, flute, clarinet, and piano. Bodin's note describe the work as variations on a theme of a two-voice canon. My ears don't hear canon inversions, so I'll accept his description. His personal web site provides two good **clips** (and **here**) of the interesting music.

If applause can be trusted, the audience favorite was the fifth work, "Darkness Visible" (1998-1999) by **Ana Lara**. Her work (for violin, viola, cello, bass, flute, clarinet, piano, percussion). This is accessible, but moody — quite appealing to an audience hearing it for the first time. Her web site gives eight mp3 **clips**, all of other works but bearing a compositional relationship to what we heard last night. Amazon has only one composition of hers, on a multi-composer CD. One of her compositions was performed by our local Long Beach, but her works deserve much more exposure.

The program closed similarly to its start, with a work about speed (or time), "Faster Still" (2004) by **Brian Current**. The master, **Alan Rich**, quotes Stucky as describing the work: "It's as if Elliott Carter wrote only arpeggios." The work is for solo violin and piano, accompanied by a traditional string quartet. The solo violin part is fast and furious (most often), and the piano part is probably somewhat challenging, although it's not as showy. Tempi change constantly. No sound clips are available. Only one of his works is listed by Amazon. His web site, however, does provide some interesting **mp3s**, on two web pages.

Steven Stucky made his point: these are composers we should hear more.

Saturday night we saw the L.A. Opera's production of "**Mahagonny**". The reviews haven't been good. I liked it. Very much. I thought it was the best realization of Brecht's theories of

theatre that I've seen, and Audra McDonald was a great Jenny. Conlon as conductor kept all touches of romanticism out of the playing. Of all my musical enthusiasms from college, the one to last has been that for Kurt Weill's music. I think Brecht is seeming more and more like an historical artifact, but that music is still fresh and bracing.

Jerry Z