

Alarm Will Sound at CSU (March 30)



by Mike Telin

The opportunity for young composers to work directly with professional musicians is crucial to their development. Each year, as part of Cleveland Contemporary Players Artist in Residency Series, students at Cleveland State University are able to work directly with some of the leading artists and ensembles in the world of contemporary classical music. Over the past few years, Andrew Rindfleisch, CSU professor of composition and director of the series, has brought the Slee Sinfonietta, the Jack Quartet, and pianist Jenny Lin to the CSU campus for residencies that have include workshops, master classes and lectures. Additionally, students have the chance to hear their compositions performed by visiting artists.

The most recent residents were the award-winning, New York City-based ensemble, Alarm Will Sound. On Monday, March 30 in CSU's Drinko Recital Hall, the 17-member group under the direction of artistic director Alan Pierson presented a free public concert that featured works written for AWS by Charles Wuorinen, Sean Friar, Aphex Twin, Steve Reich, Andrew Rindfleisch, and Clint Needham.

The evening got off to an energetic and high volume start with Charles Wuorinen's *Big Spinoff* (2011). The 10-minute work is an arrangement of Wuorinen's earlier *Spinoff* for violin, bass and conga drums, which the composer adapted for the AWS forces.

The concert marked the second time AWS has performed Sean Friar's whimsical *In the Blue* (2013). Lasting roughly 15 minutes, the piece is filled with quick accented notes tossed among the string, wind, and percussion sections. Following a slow section, the volume begins to build and ends with powerful sustained chords by the full ensemble.

AWS Ended the first half of the concert with its most frequently performed composition, Aphex Twin's *Cock/Ver 10* (2001) arranged by AWS cellist Stefan Freund. The piece is one of the first of Aphex Twin's electronica that was arranged for the group's "Acoustica" project. It includes parts for two drum sets — one a traditional trap-set and the other a mounted bass and kick drum. A blow-horn even makes an appearance. Like the two preceding works, this too is a high-energy, full-volume piece.

Drinko Hall is an intimate venue to hear music, although its wet acoustics do need to be considered when making repertoire choices. Luckily for the capacity audience and the performers, unlike the first half, the three works on the second half were a perfect fit.

Following a precise performance of Steve Reich's *Radio Rewrite* (2012) for flute, clarinet, two vibraphones, two pianos, sting quartet and electric bass, composers Andrew Rindfleisch and Clint Needham were invited to the stage to talk about their pieces. Needham wrote *Urban Sprawl* (2011) while he was composer-in-residence at the Mizzou International Composers Festival, with which AWS has had an ongoing relationship. His inspiration for the piece came when he and his wife were searching for their first house. "I remember looking at all of the hideous paint colors, wallpaper and half-completed projects," he joked.

Rindfleisch said that when he was asked to write a piece for AWS he listened to all of the music recorded by the ensemble and decided to write something completely different. *Vesper Voices* (2015), which was receiving its world premiere at the performance, is as contemplative as the title suggests. Lasting only seven minutes, the work is beautifully constructed and full of color. It begins with tremolo chords in the marimba that gradually grow until muted brass joins them and the vibraphone in a quasi-Americana section. The dynamics grow ever so slightly until chimes announce the apex of the piece. Sounds are quickly dampened, leaving a lone clarinet sustaining a quiet note. Softly accented notes in the bass bring the piece to a solemn conclusion.

Following a single, full-bodied chord, Needham's *Urban Sprawl* is off and running with its fast-moving jazzy passages — Needham even throws in some traffic cop whistles for good measure. A sassy bass clarinet and double bass duo and a plunger-muted trombone

lead the way into the flourishing *tutti* lines that eventually drive the piece home. AWS gave a fantastic performance of this most excellent work — a great way to end the evening.

Photo: AWS performing Cock/Ver 10 (YouTube still).

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