

Four percussionists delight intergenerational crowd at Music for Miles opening concert (September 13)

by Daniel Hathaway



Launched five years ago, the Music for Miles series presented its 30th performance at Waterloo Arts in Collinwood on Sunday, September 13, a concert by the Cleveland Percussion Project which attracted an admirably intergenerational audience. Headed up by Andrew Pongracz, the quartet of drummers and mallet players also included Dylan Moffitt, Bruce Golden, and Luke Rinderknecht, a stellar assembly of local professionals who held the audience of small children and adults in thrall for nearly two hours.

The first half of the chatty, informal afternoon, began with Mitch Markovich's *Four Horsemen*, with Golden on bass drum and everybody else playing snares. Its thrilling, marching band-like cadence was immediately contrasted by William Kraft's more subtle *Ostinatos*, played on the same instruments (plus tambourine) but with brushes rather than sticks. Francis McBeth's *Let's Give Them a Hand* dispensed with instruments entirely: scored for "four clappers," this inventive piece grew in intensity and rhythmic entropy, creating its own onstage applause at the end.

Continuing the theme of performing with no other instruments than they were born with, the four musicians vocalized, whispered, and whistled their way through the middle movement of John Cage's *Living Room Music*, an amusing piece based on Gertrude Stein's poem *Story*.

Then the mallets came out in force, as the four percussionists wheeled out a xylophone, marimbas, and a vibraphone — supplemented by glockenspiel, ratchet, temple blocks, triangle, and maracas — for Russian composer Gennady Butov's *Old Times*, a clever

evocation of a cuckoo clock. The first set ended with all hands again on mallets for Joe Green's energetic *Xylophonia*, a piece in ragtime style.

Intermission was kid time as the gallery staff brought out dried beans, rice, and other noise-producing commodities and helped the younger members of the audience assemble their own shakers out of taped-together plastic cups.

After the audience returned to their seats, the four percussionists launched into a series of skillful transcriptions of well-known miniatures by Palestrina, J.S. Bach, Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Humperdinck. Hearing Bach's *Air* ("on the G String") and Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* played on xylophones and marimbas was a unique, if jittery, experience. Faster pieces that didn't require tremulation to sustain long notes — like the two selections from Handel's *Water Music* — were sprightly and colorful. Three fresh-sounding selections from Chick Corea's *Children's Songs* provided a charming contrast.

Then the kids and their newly-constructed shakers got into the act with the two Mexican numbers that closed the show: Chiara's *La Spagnola* and the traditional *Cielieto Lindo*. Judging from the enthusiastic rhythms coming from the audience, there may be some budding percussion talent in that crowd.

Andrew Pongracz — who has two young children of his own — did a fine job of narrating the concert for all present, even tossing in a little rudimentary Greek lesson to give us the derivation of 'xylophone' — which is itself a member of the 'lithophone' family, a category of percussion instruments based on stones.

This eminently kid-friendly concert series makes the perfect cultural destination for families on a Sunday afternoon. For pluses, there's usually a show on display in the gallery, and the adjacent Caribbean café is open during concerts for the provision of adult beverages and food.

The series continues with two Kent State University faculty ensembles: the Black Squirrel Wind Quintet on October 11, and the KSU Brass Quintet on November 8. All concerts are at 4 pm, and all are free, thanks to funding from Local 4 of the American Federation of Musicians, the Music Performance Trust Fund, the Waterloo Arts Friends' Committee, the Ohio Arts Council, and Cuyahoga Arts and Culture.

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