

CIM New Music Ensemble in Mixon Hall (April 3)

by Mike Telin



While no title was given to the CIM New Music Ensemble's concert on Sunday, April 3, the program could have been called "Music For a Sunny Afternoon." As the sun shone brightly through the Mixon Hall windows, guest composer Robert Paterson exclaimed, "I love this place," before introducing his three works that take listeners on a fanciful ride though the galaxy, an intensive care unit, and a kitchen from hell.

In *Star Crossing* (1999), Paterson creates the sensation of traveling through the star-filled galaxy. The ensemble, conducted by the composer and featuring Audrey Whartenby (flute, piccolo, and alto flute), Zachary West (clarinet and bass clarinet), Christopher Cabrera (percussion), and Su Han Ho (piano), gave a steady, tight performance. Full of sharp, articulated rhythms as quick motifs dart from one player to the other, the work gives the illusion of dodging billions and billions of stars.

Next up was the world premiere of the quintet version of *I See You* (2014-16), inspired by a week the composer spent at his father's bedside in an ICU.

Constructed in three connected sections, "Tranquillo," a lullaby — "Sturm und Drang" (storm and stress) — and "Return," a more somber version of the opening lullaby, Paterson's work incorporates the recorded sounds of heartbeats, breathing, and children playing. The work ends with the overlapping sounds of the heartbeats of his father, himself, and his son (still in his mother's womb), creating "an intimate, multi-generational, rhythmic tapestry," Paterson writes in his composer notes.

In spite of the work's somber genesis, Paterson's use of Americana-flavored motives during the opening and concluding sections, coupled with the brisk tempo of the middle section, create an upbeat (no pun intended) musical atmosphere. His inventive

but sparing use of electronics adds to the lush texture of the string quintet. The concluding heartbeats fade into silence. Brian Allen and Hannah Landrum (violins), Andrew Stock (viola), Kristopher Duke (cello), and Kynan Horton-Thomas (bass) gave a technically secure and emotionally nuanced performance.

Hell's Kitchen (2014) evokes the frenetic rush that ensues during the 30 minutes before the guests arrive for a dinner party. In addition to acoustic instruments (piccolo, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, violin, cello, percussion, and piano), the work calls for blenders, coffee grinder, cheese grater, wooden spoons, and Pyrex and metal bowls. Conductor Pablo Devigo led a tight performance of the fun work. Percussionist Hector Flores outdid himself playing precise rhythms on everything he could shake a stick at, including the kitchen sink.

The second half was dedicated to a single work, Julius Eastman's *Stay On It* (1973), a structured improvisation for any available group of instruments, although Eastman is to have said that a piano and vibraphone should always be included. For his roughly 25-minute work, Eastman provides only an initial "riff," and asks the players to include "staged" pauses of silence, as well as giving them opportunities to improvise.

CIM New Music Ensemble director Keith Fitch's imaginative approach to the work began with pianist Gabriel Novak and percussionist Christopher Cabrera onstage trading off the infectious riff. Entering from backstage one by one, their colleagues gradually joined them to play along, beginning with Nathaniel Doucette (trombone), and followed by James Stinson (trumpet), Andrew Stock, Hannah Landrum, and Audrey Whartenby. Soprano Bernadette Mondok's soulful singing of "Stay on it, stay on it, stay on it" completed the walking jam session.

There were plenty of inventive group and solo improvisations between the repetitive riffs, as the party atmosphere built. Then each player said good-bye, exiting one by one until only Cabrera remained tapping a tambourine. This was a fun way to end the sunny Sunday afternoon program.

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