

No Exit at Bop Stop: “Homage to Eric Dolphy” (May 27)

by Joshua Rosner



Recently declared “the hippest haunt on the Cuyahoga” by New York Magazine, the Bop Stop was abuzz for No Exit’s “Homage to Eric Dolphy.” No Exit is no stranger to inventive, new programs. But especially intriguing on Saturday night, May 27 was that this outstanding new music ensemble added to its ranks a trio of talented local jazz musicians: Bobby Selvaggio (alto saxophone), Scott

McKee (trumpet/flugelhorn), and Dustin May (drum set).

“Hat and Beard,” from Dolphy’s seminal album *Out to Lunch*, was heard in an arrangement by Andrew Rindfleisch, who reimagined the piece for string trio (violinist Cara Tweed, violist, James Rhodes, and cellist Nick Diadore), trumpet, alto saxophone, and drum set.

May began with a medium-tempo swing, and the rest of the ensemble entered with a sharp, sudden pop. Diadore took the role of bass, locking in stunningly with May, while Tweed and Selvaggio played the melody with a beautiful blend. Soon the room was filled with trills from trumpet and high strings, and Rindfleisch’s arrangement became a vessel for Selvaggio’s improvisations. Thanks to Dustin May, this contemporary ensemble was swinging.

After Tweed left the stage, Luke Rinderknecht (vibraphone) and Gunnar Owen Hirthe (bass clarinet) joined the ensemble for Selvaggio’s arrangement of *Serene*. As he writes in the program notes, here the saxophonist’s fascination with avant-garde musicians playing “pretty straight-ahead” songs was apparent. The arrangement featured Rhodes and Rinderknecht improvising over backgrounds written in a way that they, too, could be

determined in the moment.

With Tweed back in the mix and the composer at the piano, Paul Epstein's *Looking for Eric* immediately set up a chaotic conversation among the musicians before settling into a bass figure between the left hand of the pianist and Hirthe. This was the first moment in the evening that sounded like fully-fledged jazz minus a bass player — the traditional big band sax soli was distributed between winds and strings before Selvaggio, McKee, and Epstein all took solos.

Selvaggio's arrangement of *Out There* begins as a ballad derived from Dolphy's melody for string trio and saxophone, then the entire ensemble improvises together before returning to the melody in unison.

The first half concluded with Tim Beyer's *Elegy* for saxophone, bass clarinet, trumpet, vibraphone, and cello, conducted by James Praznik. The most traditional chamber piece on the program, *Elegy* begins with cacophony as a Dolphy-esque line is passed around the ensemble. While Hirthe blasted out an impression of a didgeridoo, Praznik left the stage. The ensemble continued with a collective improvisation, finishing with a flurry of key clicks and McKee flicking the bell of his trumpet — one of the most sonically satisfying moments of the evening.

After intermission, Hirthe performed Roger Janotta's direct transcription of Dolphy's live solo performance of Billie Holiday's and Arthur Herzog, Jr.'s *God Bless the Child*. Hirthe made the arpeggios and his entire instrument seem effortless.

Greg D'Allesio's *Late Lunch* is a collage of themes from *Out to Lunch* with lovely orchestration, including an especially memorable blend of vibraphone, bass clarinet, and viola.

Selvaggio's arrangement of *Truth* featured lush backgrounds from bass clarinet, flugelhorn, and viola. The saxophonist soared as the improviser Cleveland has come to adore. His arrangement was reminiscent of the Third Stream greats (like Gunther Schuller) and even ended with a Picardy third (minor piece of classical music ending on a major chord).

Closing out the program was Praznik's *Iron Manic*, a restructuring of Dolphy's *Iron Man*. Taking the bare essence of that work, Praznik, who played piano for the performance, gives the ensemble a set of instructions to follow — almost a road map. Featuring large-scale improvisations, sustained strings, and an incredible drum solo from May, the piece delivered on the manic energy it promised.

A fine line exists between appropriating jazz into classical music and paying homage to a musician whose work defies genre. In this case, No Exit paid elegant tribute to Dolphy, balancing the notes he played with why Dolphy played them. One can only hope that No Exit and other ensembles in Cleveland continue to wrestle with this challenges — and, more importantly, that they are as successful as Saturday evening's homage to Eric Dolphy.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 31, 2017.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)