

Mantra Percussion at Transformer Station (Feb. 23)

by Mike Telin



Those who were lucky enough to have a ticket to the Mantra Percussion concert on Friday, February 23 at Transformer Station were treated to a spectacular sonic feast for the ears.

The evening consisted of a single work, Michael Gordon's hour-long *Timber*, scored for six instruments known as *simantras* — 2x4's

mounted on metal frames and struck with mallets and fingers. Rooted in the Eastern Orthodox liturgical tradition, the instruments were first introduced into classical music by composer Iannis Xenakis. The concert was presented as part of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Performing Arts Series.

The venue provided the perfect acoustic for Al Cerulo, Michael McCurdy, Joe Bergen, Chris Graham, Joe Tucker, and Mark Utley to line up the work's complicated *polyrhythms* — playing two different divisions of time at once between two hands — as well as playing polyrhythms on top of a polyrhythmic pulse. The result was a sometimes lulling, sometimes intense listening experience.

Prior to the performance it was explained that small microphones are attached to the wood to pick up the vibrations, which are then equalized through a mixing board.

If all of this sounds complicated, it is, but the beauty of the piece is that you don't need to understand it. You can simply bask in the splendor of the mesmerizing sound

palette created by the ensemble. Beginning softly, the overtones grow, as the inner melodic lines come to the fore and retreat again. The players were spot on as the slowly shifting polyrhythms created otherworldly sounds — where are those voices coming from?

Then, as the sound world becomes more and more quiet, a finger tap on the wood brings the very short hour to an end. I was left with the feeling of not knowing exactly where I had been — I only knew that I wanted to go back again.

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