

NEOSonicFest: Cleveland Chamber Symphony Young and Emerging Composers (April 11)

by Daniel Hathaway



The final event in the Cleveland Chamber Symphony's 2018 NEOSonicFest gave eight young composers the opportunity to hear their creations played by a professional orchestra led by Steven Smith — himself a composer. The pieces were performed in Gamble

Auditorium at Baldwin Wallace University on Wednesday, April 11.

The evening was billed as the “Young and Emerging Composers Concert,” a title which suggests that the burgeoning authors are breaking out of a chrysalis, or perhaps bravely rising out of a primordial ooze. In fact, they're in different stages of finding their individual voices, and it's fascinating to hear what composers have influenced them at this point in their development.

Davison Yon from Cleveland State University was up first with his *Hero's Journey: Protagonist*, from a suite that explores the various qualities of a hero. Beginning with a horn solo over a drone, the piece features interesting harmonic shifts.

Kent State's Benjamin Grove was represented by his *Caduceus*, inspired by the image of two snakes wrapped around a rod that represent two independent motives moving toward a combined sonority. Marked by strong rhythmic motives, the piece begins with minimalist gestures in the woodwinds that are taken up by percussion.

Emilio José González of Bowling Green State University contributed his *La Isla de las Muñecas*, telling the mythical tale of the Mexican Island of Dolls whose

inhabitants move and whisper at night. Mystical harp, percussion, flute, and violin are joined by bass clarinet and brass solos to create a haunting mood.

Tri-C composer Samuel Ryan Silverman was represented by two movements from *The Castle Suite*. “Wizard’s Ghost” begins in a mysterious orchestral miasma with harp, and quickly grows in complexity and heft. “The Courtyard” depicts exotic plants with lighter textures in winds and strings.

Czech-born composer Jiří Trtík, now studying at CIM, presented his *Three Moods* exploring spaces, colors, and textures, noting that the last part is his “commentary on the inauthenticity of contemporary popular musical culture.” The piece begins with an orchestrated unison that sags downward amid piquant textures, a horn solo, and parallel woodwind chords. An English horn solo inspires the ensemble to gather toward a climax, and a kind of dance turns mawkish.

Baldwin Wallace’s Nabil Abad’s intentionally cerebral and dissonant *Variations* is based on five chromatic pitches which move from treble to bass, including tremolos and screeches during nine distinct sections.

Cody Ray of the University of Akron (pictured at top) explores the water cycle in his *Moving Through States*. His Coplandesque musical gestures involve vibraphone and cross fades into more dissonant sections. A motive is passed upwards in the strings, beginning with the violas, before the piece ends in the major mode.

The sole woman on the program, Oberlin’s Soomin Kim had traditional Korean dance in mind when she wrote *Mu*. The piece begins with subtle percussion effects like sand blocks. Later, rhythms become complex, and violin and flute solos with harp lead on to a pentatonic fugue. Wind players produce ghostly sounds by blowing through their instruments.

Smith and the Orchestra gave each composer assured and committed performances of their pieces. The event made you wish that the Cleveland Chamber Symphony could once again establish a year-round presence in Cleveland’s musical scene.

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