

Time Canvas & Archie Green go acoustic at St. John's (Aug. 11)

by David Kulma



With the power out in Ohio City around W 25th St and Detroit Ave on Saturday night, August 11, Time Canvas gave a fascinatingly engaging — and unexpectedly unplugged and candlelit — final concert in their three-part *Home Not Home* series. Titled “Hip Hop and Minimalism,” this program at Historic St. John’s focused on the Black American experience represented by local emcee and mental health advocate Archie Green. The main project of the night was mashups: using classic minimalist music by four composers as the backing tracks for Green’s eloquent rapping of righteous, warranted indignation.

As noted by both Green and Time Canvas executive director Joshua Stauffer, these tangential musics have few direct connections. Minimalism grew out of the avant-garde scene of downtown Manhattan in the ‘60s, while hip hop began in house parties in the Bronx projects a decade later. Through post-war technology, the separate innovations of both phasing tape loops and endless turntable breakbeats helped create musical styles built from relentless repetition. So stapling Green’s rapping to minimalist mainstays made aural sense and felt impressively natural. The goal was to give Green the floor to speak truth and give voice. The results were powerful and memorable even without the obligatory electricity and microphones.

The power went out at the end of the pre-show soundcheck, so Stauffer’s electric guitar stayed in its case in favor of acoustic. He and violinist and artistic director Chiara Fasani Stauffer were joined by two guests: double bassist Joel Negus and percussionist Luke Rinderknecht. Throughout six minimalisms and two Green originals, these four instrumentalists — and as needed, a small, tinny bluetooth speaker — filled the resonant

Parish Hall with the precise sounds of evocative arpeggios, sumptuous long tones, and spunky repeated notes. Even without a mic, Green successfully boomed above the din.

As the sunset light slowly became darkness, Green dug deeper and deeper into the systemic injustice of our society with a selected group of eight songs in the conscious hip hop mode. Among them, *U Wouldn't Understand* took shots at meme culture in the satirical guise of trap. *Good Morning America* — here over pastoral minimalist warbling — played with images of the coding of black men as terrorists, while also celebrating Spike Lee. Over Stauffer's sweet acoustic guitar, the moving *Blacks Only* railed at cops who “keep killing us ‘cause they don't understand.” In the longest and most memorable stretch, *Suspicious* told of Trayvon Martin and once again a lack of understanding, then pivoted to a memorial of names. He ended this heart-rending ritual kneeling in prayer, and upon standing intoning *Black Lives Matter* with fist raised.

Written in celebration of Chance the Rapper's Grammy wins last year, the final song turned to another of Green's main topics: black excellence. Green and Time Canvas gave a scintillating, improvisatory rendition including audience backbeat snaps and the only sung hook of the evening. Tonight, Time Canvas and Archie Green created a singular experience in this historical stop on the Underground Railroad that was only enhanced by the reliance on candles and flashlights.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com August 20, 2018.

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