

Re:Sound Festival of New and Experimental Music — concerts one & six

by Mike Telin



It's hard to believe that it was only a year and a half ago that area audiences were introduced to the Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project (CUSP). With all of the high-quality programs they have produced since that time, the organization already feels like a trusted friend.

Founded by saxophonist Noa Even and cellist Sophie Benn, CUSP's engaging programming

brings together the new music enthusiast and the new music curious. One way that is accomplished is through the annual Re:Sound Festival of New and Experimental Music, which ran from June 6 through June 9 and included six concerts featuring fourteen soloists and ensembles from across the United States at venues around the city. I attended the opening and closing events.

The Festival kicked off on Thursday, June 6, at the funky Negative Space Gallery. First up was Cleveland-based duo Miralia/Stranahan — Lisa Miralia, electronics, and Paul Stranahan, percussion — whose improvisation drew on influences from avant-garde, experimental noise, metal, and ambient musics. Although the duo produced a colorful palette of sound, the twenty-minute improvisation had



a predictable structure: beginning softly with tiny bells and ringing bowls underpinned by atmospheric electronics, it grew in volume until it reached an ear-shattering level when Stranahan brought a drum set and gongs into the mix. Then, the sound reversed course and gradually became quiet — a nice way to begin the Festival.

The music went acoustic with a technically superb and musically brilliant performance by Chicago-based saxophone quartet ~Nois (Brandon Quarles, Hunter Bockes, Jordan Lulloff, and János Csontos). The ensemble produced a richly hued blend, its musical prowess evident from the first bars of Gemma Peacocke's haunting and rhythmically puckish *Dwalm*. David Reminick's *Consort* for four de-tuned soprano saxophones is defined by quiet, short, articulated passages and sudden bursts of sound. The players were perfectly in sync as they tossed the musical line from one to the other. Their set concluded with an outstanding performance of Pauline Oliveros' text score *Thirteen Changes*. ~Nois clearly had both a musical and theatrical plan for each of the composer's lines of poetic prose, evocative images, and mysterious statements. No. 12, "Elephants Mating in a Secret Grove," was especially vivid.

The final act of the evening was saajtak, a Detroit-based art-rock quartet comprised of vocalist Alex Koi, electronic artist Simon Alexander-Adams, percussionist Jonathan Taylor, and bassist Ben Willis. While it would have been nice to hear them in a room that provided a bit more auditory clarity, their engaging, musically diverse set included everything from pop to popera to progressive rock to Latin-tinged jazz. It's well worth checking them out in the future.



No Exit, one of Cleveland's premier new music ensembles, was first up on Sunday, June 9 at the Bop Stop. Their set included two world premieres by participants in CUSP's CoLab project, a months-long collaboration with area high school composers that provided them the opportunity to workshop their pieces with No Exit musicians.



The Canary and The Crane by Emma Eddy, a freshman at Avon High School, creates a melodic array of birdsongs that seamlessly move from one motif to another. Violinist Cara Tweed, clarinetist Gunnar Owen Hirthe, and flutist Sean Gabriel brought these colorful sounds to vivid life.

The second premiere, Mya Vandegrift's *Non-Alcoholic Beverages*, is evocative of Monet's *Water Lilies*. Tweed, Gabriel (now on alto flute), and percussionist Luke

Rinderknecht, who produced perfect intonation on wine glasses, gave a committed performance of the well-structured, atmospheric work.

The ensemble vibrantly performed Yoon-Ji Lee's *In Dark Sunshine*, written in both traditional and graphic notation. A faculty member at Berklee, Lee constructs an array of musical imagery through fast, driving percussive passages juxtaposed with gentle, soft sound clouds. Tweed, Hirthe, and Rinderknecht negotiated the many complex rhythms with ease, and the decaying sound of a cymbal and a long violin slide brought the piece and the set to an artful conclusion.



Pianist Ju-Ping Song presented two works based on fallibility and trauma. Amy Beth Kirsten's *h.o.p.e.* — inspired by *The Big Hope Show*, an exhibition by artists who have survived enormous personal trauma — finds the pianist doing double-duty, simultaneously playing grand and toy pianos. The unison passages are reminiscent of a Medieval chant that occasionally plays with off-kilter rhythms. The work also asks the pianist to produce

Sprechstimme-like sounds — all of which are repeated and repeated again.

Canadian composer and turntablist Nicole Lizée's *Lynch Études* explore her preoccupation with the fallibility of media in excerpts from David Lynch's films. While the music provides a captivating backdrop to the humorously edited and repetitive film excerpts, that humor diminished over its roughly twenty minutes. Still, the piece provided Ju-Ping Song the opportunity to demonstrate her formidable technique and keen musical sensibilities.

The program described ParkJones, a collaboration between composers Joo Won Park and Molly Jones, as “a platform for both to expand their electroacoustic improvisations.” The duo were inventive with their fast paced electronics while each utilized a seemingly endless bag of tricks. Jones added a blow-horn, saxophone, and bells, and each wailed away on recorders — it was all sensory overload at its best and brought the afternoon and the Festival to a fine conclusion.



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