

**Cleveland Chamber Collective & Inlet Dance Theatre:  
*Caliban Ascendant* (Aug. 29)**

by Peter Feher



Shakespeare in the park got an update over the weekend when the musicians of the Cleveland Chamber Collective partnered with Inlet Dance Theatre for a modern take on *The Tempest*. The collaborative result, *Caliban Ascendant*, premiered to an enthusiastic audience at Cain Park's Evans Amphitheater on August 29.

The story was kept simple, though the performances were anything but. Ty Alan Emerson — who composed the score, adapted the story with friend and colleague Joshua Legg, and conducted Sunday's premiere — didn't skimp on the musical demands.

The work calls for a battery of percussion and a group of chamber musicians willing to play outside of the box, from passages for prepared piano to extended technique after extended technique. The Collective, some of whom are members of The Cleveland Orchestra, gave a clean, confident reading of the piece, at a level you'll only hear from established ensemble players.

The choreography for Sunday's performance was likewise highwire and impressive. Inlet executive/artistic director Bill Wade, who developed the movement along with company dancers, put the cast in acrobatic configurations — backs arched, arms and legs intertwined, and at key moments balancing each other in the air.

The point was to have the performers rely on one another, an idea reinforced by double-casting two of the roles, Caliban and Ariel. Josh Schaeffer and Sabrina Lindhout

portrayed the title character in matching orange, and Mason Alexander and Stephanie Ruth Roston took on the role of the gentler Ariel in sky blue.

This banding together was in direct opposition to Prospero — the main character in Shakespeare’s play, but in this retelling just a straightforward villain. Drake Dombroski had the part to himself, and he less danced, more swaggered onstage, only to break out in flashes of choreographed violence.

There’s a tradition with *The Tempest* of shifting the focus from Prospero to Caliban, though it risks simplifying both characters and making this a story about good guys versus bad. The most effective moments in *Caliban Ascendant* were ambiguous and open to interpretation — a stick that was a tool in one dancer’s hands and a weapon in another’s. Even the bit of costuming for the musicians — a loose rope collar that could be seaweed, could be chains — captured the dual spirit of the production.

The Collective had the stage to itself for the first half of Sunday’s performance and set an experimental, adventurous tone for the evening with a short new-music program. Violinists Kim Gomez and Emma Shook, violist Lisa Boyko, and cellist Linda Atherton took on the most substantial piece, Reena Esmail’s *String Quartet (Ragamala)*. Esmail’s work, which blends Western and Indian musical forms in movement titles like “Scherzo (Malkauns)” and “Rondo (Jōg),” can sound disconnected in its droning slower sections but picks up power with every unison gesture across the quartet.

The musicians tapped into something primal with two short, percussive selections. David Lang’s *lend/lease*, a duet for piccolo and pitched woodblocks, had each instrument playing off the pleasant hollowness of the other. The first movement from Nebojsa Jovan Zivkovic’s *Trio per Uno* was all percussion, three players with their own setups but sharing an upturned bass drum between them — making for a dynamic, almost choreographed number.

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