

RE:Sound: Warp Trio and Robin Blake Sound Experiment (June 9)

by Jacob Strauss



On Thursday June 9, the Re:sound festival kicked off with two dynamic sets from the New York-based ensemble Warp Trio, and Cleveland's own Robin Blake Sound Experiment.

Warp Trio took the stage as a quartet and began Duke Ellington's *Black and Tan Fantasy*. Josh Henderson's bow biting the strings of his electric violin sounded like a Bartók sonata infused with the blues. It sneered and bared its teeth. It was abrasive, and after the angst, the blues caught the collar of the snarling beast and calmed it.

Pianist Mykael Darmanie began to dance a Czech-inspired duet with the violin, then Rick Martinez came in with a brush and a thump on the bass drum, keeping them in stride together. Cellist Julia Henderson joined in on the bebop, accompanying Mykael's dialogue. A big band stepped in, and Henderson found himself playing a solo in the style, now much changed from how the tune began.

They invited Brendan Randall-Myers onstage to introduce his composition, *Grounding Sparks*, which he said was inspired by a line in a Bartók violin sonata that Josh had played for him. He took that musical idea and, because of certain things that were on his

mind, composed something that mimics the brain's trance-induced flow state, which is like a spinning wheel being slowly rolled up a hill and controlled downhill.

Josh Henderson leaned forward on his pedal, floating his bow on delays and reverbs, like puffs of smoke vectored out beyond its tip — soft, though not delicate. Julia Henderson joined in, making a similar impression, then Darmanie played a hopeful sequence of chords. As Martinez hit his toms lightly with a mallet the music firmed up, taking on more purpose, and was driven faster until the ensemble hit its groove..

That momentum reached the summit, then decelerated. Darmanie quickly embedded a flight of spinning notes. The groove picked back up with cello pizzicatos and drum syncopations against the piano, swelling and burning, and extinguishing itself in a melancholic crackle of pizzicato. The piano lifted it out of exhaustion with a long breath.

Robin Blake Sound Experiment is a contemporary big band, a nine piece ensemble of singers, and traditional and electronic instruments. Robin Blake's untitled composition, receiving its debut tonight, was inspired by West African mythology and structured by the Vedic elements: fire, earth, water, then air.

Fire began with the soothing ether from an electronic tanpura. The brass and winds built on top of it, the guitar entered with a yacht-rock riff before the bongos applied a rhythm and the bassist delivered some lines of their own. The bass clarinet gurgled from beneath, the trumpet blew, and the electric guitar squealed — fire shooting up from a caldera.

With the earth formed, the vocalist whistled like a bird taking off from a tree to survey the vegetation sprouting quickly over the land, the loam rich with the nutrients, a steady bass synth sauntering along, doing its thing consistently — giving growth. The vocalizations grew, her ornamenting voice soared, then Robin Blake soloed on his electric clarinet, a walk through mossy paths and the lure of life.

Tides formed in the clarinet. Water washed over rocks with the bongos, a bass of shifting sand, and the trumpet's hopeful melody.

The ensemble breathed air. A rich falsetto, maracas, birds, oscillating synths floating through rustling trees, the bongos of knocking wood. The trumpet whistled through the bottom of its valves. The guitar grounded the wind. The elements combined, the ensemble all together now in cosmic flight with the return of the tanpura, before they vanished and became people once again.

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