

## Genkin Philharmonic wows at the Bop Stop (Nov. 4)

by Mike Telin



We've all heard the hype — “Trust me, you've never heard anything like this before.” At long last that cliché proved to be correct on November 4 when the Buffalo-based Genkin Philharmonic presented a jaw-dropping, undefinable show for a capacity audience at the Bop Stop .

What makes this ten-piece electroacoustic chamber ensemble distinct from other contemporary music ensembles? It's what they play. The evening's repertoire included brilliant arrangements by Genkin founder and trumpeter Jon Nelson of music by Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa, classical compositions of Bartók and Prokofiev, as well as works written for the group by composers who are still very much alive.

From the get-go you could tell this was not going to be an ordinary listening experience. Beginning with Jimi Hendrix's *Third Stone from the Sun* and *Purple Haze*, wild, screaming instrumental lines backed up bassist and vocalist Michael Wagner's guttural

vocals as if channeling Hendrix himself. The set also featured a mind-boggling, ear shattering solo by trumpeter Tim Clarke.

Other arrangements from the Rock & funk worlds were Curtis Mayfield's *Little Child Runnin' Wild*. Here tenor saxophonist Dalton Sharp showed off his dazzling technical skills over Wagner's driving bassline. The Genkin offered up some superfast unison licks during Frank Zappa's *Big Swifty*. In *The Black Page*, Harry Graser, on keys, commanded the room's attention. And Sylvester Stewart's (a.k.a. Sly Stone) *Luv N' Haight* Sly Stone was pure grooving funk. What fun!

Nelson's transcription of two movements from Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* were highlighted by screeching ensemble unisons coupled with intricate technical lines that captured the piece in a way that the composer would have enjoyed. And Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* included a kaleidoscope of other-worldly sounds taken to the nth degree.

While it was fascinating to hear these splendidly reimagined works performed by top-notch musicians, the most interesting pieces were those written specifically for the Genkin Philharmonic by composers of our time.

David Sanford's *Gumby at Large* and *Thaxadrone* (2012) provided an opportunity for violinist Isable Ong to emerge from the instrumental colors into the spotlight during the opening. And Buffalo-based Caroline Mallonee's *Hey Yeah, I'm Waiting* tapped into Wagner's vocal prowess. Accompanied by virtuosic ensemble passages, the work gradually transforms into a mesmerizing punk opera.

Cleveland-based composer Andrew Rindfleish's *The Beef Brigade* is defined by a smooth bassline underpinned by long chords from the ensemble. The wailing, honking, and growling bari sax solo by Steve Baczkowski traversed all registers of the instrument.

Genkin guitarist Zane Merritt, brought a new work to the show. *All Outa Bubblegum* exudes complex rhythmic passages that are passed from player to player. The ensuing cacophony was reminiscent of a Balkan brass band.

The evening concluded the way it began, with Hendrix. This time the tune was *Crosstown Traffic* and the performance, simply put, was great. And finally it was drummer Matthew Felski's and percussionist Ravi Padmanabha's time to strut their stuff. And along with their Genkin colleagues, strut their stuff they did.

This was a performance that defies words. As the person sitting at the table next to me said, "All I can say is WOW!"

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 27, 2022.*

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