

## No Exit and Zeitgeist: together again

by Mike Telin



It's no secret that the pandemic caused many arts organizations to alter their plans. And while presenting concerts online was a suitable and often enjoyable alternative, they were no replacement for the shared experience of live performances.

On Thursday, February 2 at 8:00 pm at Cleveland State University's Drinko Recital Hall, No Exit and St. Paul's Zeitgeist will once again share the stage. "This is the first time in a few years that we'll be performing together live and in person, and we're really looking forward to it," No Exit artistic director Timothy Beyer said during a recent telephone conversation.

The concerts are part of the two ensembles' annual "Here and There" concert series. No Exit will perform a recent composition by Luis Daniel Jiménez Rojas and give the world premiere of works by Philip Blackburn and Jonathan Posthuma. Zeitgeist will present music by Alvin Lucier and Frederic Rzewski, and the ensembles will collectively perform George Lewis's *Shadowgraph*, 5. The program will be repeated on Saturday at 7:00 pm at Heights Arts, and both are free.

Beyer said that Rojas's *Cachivaches* premiered last summer and was brought to his attention by No Exit percussionist Luke Rinderknecht. "He teaches at Bowdoin and Luis was one of the composers he worked with."

Beyer noted that Blackburn's *The Sound of a Going in the Tops of the Mulberry Trees* was supposed to be premiered in 2020, but they chose not to perform it online because the work's performative nature "would not have translated well to video."

In his program note, Blackburn says that the piece ties together his interest in site-specific works and coded soundscapes and is an imagined soundworld of the Underground Railroad as it passes through Ohio.

The composer explains that a relative moved to Mt. Pleasant near Cincinnati in 1830 with the mission to plant 3,000 mulberry trees to feed silkworms for the family silk business. The environment did not support the trees, but while he was there he became an abolitionist and secret conductor on the Underground Railroad. The work includes the sounds of knocks on a window, train brakes, and Gospel hymns.

Posthuma's *Small World (Kleinwelt, 1914)* is inspired by Paul Klee's painting of the same name. The piece also references Anton Webern's *Drei Kleine Stücke*, which was composed in 1914.

Rzewski's *Lost Melody* for piano, clarinet, and two percussionists is a single-movement work based on a Yiddish ballad. And Lucier's *Heavier Than Air* is for an unspecified number of players with carbon dioxide-filled balloons. Each performer prepares short sentences beginning with the words "I remember" and completed with a personal memory.

Lewis's *Shadowgraph, 5* is the last in a series of works for "creative orchestra" that Lewis composed between 1975 and 1977. The title is borrowed from Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's essay "Shadowgraphs: A Psychological Pastime."

In his program note, the composer says, "There is no centralized score for this piece, and no conductor is needed. Instead, for each part there is a set of instructions, laid out on a grid, from which one can select tasks more or less according to volition. The piece is designed for large ensemble, and the parts refer to membership in instrumental groupings: voice, woodwinds/saxophones, brass, piano/keyboard, strings, and percussion. Any number or combination of performers can take part, and each part can also be deployed in solo performance. The duration of the piece is determined by real-time, sonically determined negotiation and consensus within the ensemble."

On Friday, February 3 at 8:00 pm at SPACES, the two ensembles will present a program that features Kaija Saariaho's *Duft* for solo clarinet, Luke Rinderknecht's *Resonances* for solo percussion, James Praznik's *SPAZZ* for solo flute, and Rob Kovacs' *Marble Madness* for solo piano. The works by Rzewski, Lucier, and Lewis will also be performed.

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