

*She Scores: a cornucopia of first-rate pieces (June 3)*

by Kevin McLaughlin



Seven first-rate pieces for small ensembles received superb performances on Saturday, June 3 as part of the Local 4 Music Fund's *She Scores* series, which spanned three programs over three days in Drinko Hall at Cleveland State University. Oberlin Conservatory musicology professor Emily Laurance provided informative and engaging remarks beforehand. The program offered a cornucopia of ear-tugging, seldom-heard pieces, or premieres, all by women-identifying or non-binary composers, many with Ohio or Cleveland connections.

Akron native Margi Griebing-Haigh, a longtime fixture of the Cleveland new music scene, was represented by *¡de Chiripa!*, the opening work. The title translates to “by chance” or “by a fluke,” suggesting a playful or casual perspective. Scored for English horn and two guitars, the work references Spanish music both through its title and its use of Phrygian semitones and dance rhythms. Guitarists Andy Poxon and Bryan Reichert contributed to the Mediterranean warmth, and English hornist Cyn Warren displayed apt nobility and ardor.

Scored for cello and percussion, Oberlin composition student Chloe Arnold's *don't tell me the glass isn't broken* combines a largely high tessitura and sustained sounds. The idea of glass is suggested in the work's timbres, a combination of cello harmonics, vibraphone, tubular bells, suspended cymbals, and humming. Throughout the piece, the composer has both players hum “to depict denial in the presence of a current reality that, if provoked, can evolve into something more,” though to this listener, it was barely audible. Composed in 2021 during the height of pandemic social distancing, the work also asks players to don masks as another way to express denial. Cellist Robert Nicholson

and percussionist Matthew Holm played with unerring security.

Dolores White, who passed away on March 24 at the age of 90, was a beloved Cleveland presence whose works deserve many more appearances on programs. Her *Rhapsody* for alto saxophone and piano exuded more than a hint of jazz in songful and dance-like episodes. White's delicious music was brilliantly captured by saxophonist Drew Hosler and pianist Eric Charnofsky.

The five movements of Inna Onofrei's *Dalí Miniatures* are based on paintings by the Spanish artist Salvador Dalí and one digital interpretation of Dalí by Aram Vardazaryan. The string quartet of Andrea Belding Elson and Leah Goor Burtnett, violins, Amber Rogers, viola, and Derek Snyder, cello, fully rendered the emotional character and impact of each scene — the disintegration of the atom, the melting of space and time, the red rose (or natural Om symbol), a caravan of emaciated elephants, and the merciless face of war — for a whimsical and ultimately moving human pageant.

Elillian Daugherty's *Cat and Bird* (subtitled "a semi-atonal tone poem for frenemies") describes a multi-scene engagement between two domestic animals — bird and cat, portrayed by flute and bassoon respectively — with piano and percussion providing sonic backdrop and commentary. It is colorful and charming music, not least for the movement titles (including "Mom, there's nothing to do. Can't we go outside or something?") and creative interplay between the musical actors. Flutist Linda White and bassoonist Arleigh Savage calmly glided through the significant technical demands. Percussionist Matthew Holm and pianist Randall Fusco, too, showed themselves to be the composer's friends.

JaeEun Schermerhorn's *Back When the Tigers Smoked* for tenor saxophone (Drew Hosler) and piano (Eric Charnofsky) also held the ear. The piece is based on an ancient Korean creation tale in which a tiger and bear agree to be tested by the gods with the reward, if successful, of human form. The piano plays a slow introduction, representing a kind of "once upon a time," before the saxophone introduces the characters in turn — first the tiger, then the bear in 3/4 time. The musical language, mostly conventional, becomes theatrical midway with techniques such as scraping of piano strings and sax flutter tonguing to describe life in the cave.

A cannon's volley from four saxophones was the loud and shocking opening to *Hiatus*, the concluding work on the program. Composed by Susanna Hancock, another *She Scores* alumna, the title reflects the natural stopping and starting of the creative process, quiet and static textures intercutting with kinetic and loud passages. Activity is interrupted repeatedly by the music's many gaps, gradually getting quieter, and then slower and narrower in range. It may have been the most arresting work all evening from a purely sonic standpoint. Perry Roth, soprano, John Perrine, alto, Drew Hosler, tenor,

and Gabriel Pique, baritone, formed the quartet.

One curmudgeonly complaint about the program booklet from someone who likes to read program booklets: crucial text was cut off and the font — a brave and exotic choice — was nearly illegible. Also, several of the movements of pieces were inexplicably missing. Harrumph.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 6, 2023.*

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