

Cleveland Composers Guild at Fairmount Presbyterian (Jan. 21)

by Sicily Xiao



On January 21, a serene Sunday afternoon, the Cleveland Composers Guild curated the second concert of its 2023-2024 season at Fairmount Presbyterian Church. The program, dedicated to cutting edge chamber music compositions, included the 1st prize winner of the Guild's 11th Collegiate Composition Contest.

The concert began with Ty Alan Emerson's *Pan Songs* played by percussionist Dylan Moffitt on a version of the modern steelpan which avoided precise tuning, resulting in a distinctive harmonic and spatial system. The emphasis on sound, color, and rhythm

beautifully showcased Emerson's concepts. In the second movement, Moffitt traded mallets for brushes, more commonly used in jazz, adding a layer of flexibility to the timbral palette.

The spotlight then shifted to Gracelyn Jack's (pictured) prize-winning piece, *Less Than Ten Days*. Drawing inspiration from Luna Moths, which have a lifespan of less than ten days, yet have existed for thousands of years as a species, Jack's composition delves into the interplay between the transient and the timeless. The perfect synergy between violinist Barton Samuel Rotberg and pianist Sungeun Kim served as an embodiment of this thematic exploration. In the first segment, short notes in the violin flutter like moths beneath streetlights, their luminosity glorious yet ephemeral. As the piece moves forward, the piano decorates the short notes with trills while the violin sustains notes. The players merged their lines seamlessly, unveiling a paradoxical yet harmonious relationship

between the fleeting and the eternal—an artistic narrative that resonated with profound depth and beauty.

Karen Griebing's *Petroglyph Dances* featured the composer on viola, Drew Hosler on tenor saxophone, and Eric Charnofsky on piano. Four movements of the work were played. The vivacious "Antelope Hunters," infused the performance with a captivating liveliness. While "Gossamer-Winged Butterfly," captured the image of the insect flying lightly on the brisk air streams between valleys.

After the intermission came *Astghik and Nane* by Armenian-American composer Inna Onofrei. "Astghik," the Armenian goddess of maidenly beauty and water, unfolded with impressionistic allure. Derek Snyder's cello playing was the embodiment of graceful divinity, while pianist Megan Denman's lines resonated like a shimmering lake enveloping the goddess. With "Nane," the Armenian goddess of war and wisdom, the atmosphere shifted dramatically, taking on a more assertive character with strong, short, and passionate notes.

Sonatina by Matthew C. Saunders is breathtaking and oboist Opal Curry and pianist Eric Charnofsky, handled the fast note progressions, long phrases, and several difficult techniques with élan. Ryan Charles Ramer's *Coup d'Essai*, stunningly performed by pianist John Gamin, mimicked how composers exploit the sound possibilities of the piano.

The concert concluded with Chris Neiner's *Afterlove*. Performed by clarinetist Jazmin Pascual, cellist Brendon Phelps, violinist Maria Beyens, and the composer at the piano, this emotive piece wonderfully unfolded a remarkable, melancholic melody. The players' individual artistry seamlessly converged into a harmonious whole, crafting a lasting resonance.

Against the backdrop of timeless arches and stained glass — a harmonious blend of acoustics and aesthetics — this afternoon's musical journey, full of exploratory spirits, brought a freshness to the greyness of January.

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