

The _____ Experiment Shines in Tremont

By Peyton Avery



On Sunday September 15, Tremont's Kaiser Gallery was alive with the sound of new music. Using fish bowls, gongs, multiphonics, and operas, members of Chicago-based The _____ Experiment made sure the afternoon's concert remained lively and dynamic. Joined by Cleveland percussionist Joseph Fox, founding members Oboist Ava Wirth and saxophonist Drew Holser presented an

hour-long program featuring a variety of musical styles.

If you are looking for a unique and relaxing venue, The Kaiser Gallery is the perfect destination. Although it is small and minimalist, the gallery is surprisingly spacious. With its ever-changing exhibits and a bar, this gallery is the ideal space to enjoy a mid-day cocktail and some music.

Like the gallery itself, the goal of The _____ Experiment is to introduce new music to the world. By sourcing a large portion of their music through community submissions and collaborating with local musicians the group has made this music more accessible than ever. The program began with selections from Matthew Kennedy's *Miniature for One*, allowing each musician to shine before Wirth and Holser paired up for the final miniature.

As the program unfolded, several pieces stood out. Erin Gee's *Mouthpiece XXIV* for tenor saxophone and percussion beautifully demonstrated both musicians' fluency with technical and lyrical passages. Fox showed off his versatility and skill by repeatedly alternating between traditional percussion instruments, whistling in harmony, and creating sounds by playing with water in a fishbowl alongside Holser's saxophone. However, the piece overall felt like a drawn-out attempt at voicing your opinion at Thanksgiving dinner with the family.

Of the two world premieres, Amelia Brey's *Upwards of Three* for tenor saxophone and oboe made the biggest impression. Her work is divided into four sections. The first

evokes a minimalist and serene beauty similar to the music of Philip Glass. The second felt unnecessarily busy, and made the duo sound like two soloists rather than a pair. The third is a brief dance-like transition leading into a final section that resembles a modern take on an opera overture — pleasant yet filled with many open and dissonant intervals.

As a duo, Wirth and Fox performed Du Yun's *Oboe and Tam-tam Duet* from *Angel's Bone*, an opera about an angel falling into a couple's backyard, having its wings cut off, and being trafficked. With Wirth's virtuosity and Fox's attention to detail, Yun's opera was vividly brought to life in the small gallery. Wirth's impressive control and effortless use of extended techniques left both her and the audience breathless.

The highlight of the afternoon was Cleveland native Cara Haxo's *Stories, Secrets, and Forgotten Wisdom*. Inspired by the comedy-drama *Only Murders in the Building*, Haxo's piece uses melodic fragments to represent stories, complex passages to convey secrets, and multiphonics to assist with the delivery of the composer's embedded melodic wisdom. Saxophonist Drew Holser's sensitive and thoughtful interpretation captured Haxo's vision, creating a mesmerizing performance that left me eager for more of her music and Holser's expressive playing.

Despite the afternoon's musical successes, there were a few drawbacks. The open floor plan of the venue was acoustically unforgiving, making everything either too loud or too soft. While leaving the gallery door open to invite foot traffic was a nice idea, the external noise from the busy street was distracting.

The _____ Experiment members and Joseph Fox set out to provide the audience with a fresh perspective on new music, and they certainly succeeded. From the moment I walked in, I felt welcomed by Holser, Wirth, and Fox, who were friendly and eager to chat before the performance. More than your usual chamber group, they are a community-driven ensemble that invites collaboration with local musicians, all with the goal of making new music accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

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