

No Exit and Zeitgeist: An Evocation of Our Current Time (Jan. 9)

By Mike Telin



On Saturday, January 9 at SPACES, Cleveland-based No Exit and St. Paul-based Zeitgeist continued their long-standing collaboration with *An Evocation of Our Current Time*.

Unlike most performances where the audience is aware of what they will be experiencing, this one gave you very little information in advance other than it was to be “a 55-minute multimedia experience that draws on improvisation, film, artificial intelligence, environmental manipulation, lies, magic, gaslighting and other forms of chicanery.”

Unlike most No Exit concerts there were no elaborate programs to follow. And instead of presenting a number of works by a variety of composers, *An Evocation of Our Current Time* was a single work by No Exit artistic director Timothy Beyer with technical assistance by James Praznik. As the capacity audience took their seats in the long gallery they were face to face with a dozen musicians, a projector, and a white wall.

In an interview, Beyer said that “what we’re seeking to evoke about our current time is our real-time descent into cruelty, tribalism and the loss of a shared humanity.” The score is a structured improvisation, which calls on the musicians to play an important role in the creation of the music.

What makes Beyer’s work so compelling is the manipulation of images and music into a nearly hour-long crescendo that relentlessly hammers that message into the consciousness (and the conscience) of the audience until it becomes nearly unbearable. The relentlessly disturbing photos multiply and cycle more frequently while the music grows to ear-splitting volume.

Those photos flash through a long list of images some deeply disturbing and others cringe worthy: Young students reciting the Pledge of Allegiance — a blond Jesus — Mein Kampf — Doctors measuring people's noses — Slave ships — President Trump with Hooters girls — “They're poisoning the blood of our country” — “Slavery was good for black people” — KKK — ICE deportations — “Thank God for AIDS” — Lynchings — “I've done my own research” — blond women in White Power t-shirts — A sign: Colored waiting room — Nazis — “The Holocaust is a hoax” — Emaciated people in concentration camps — Over six million Jews died in the Holocaust — concentration camp mass graves — “You have some very fine people on both sides” — Book burnings — Trump superimposed over Hitler — and finally, “The death of human empathy is one of the earliest and most telling signs of a culture about to fall into barbarism” ~Hannah Arendt

An Evocation of Our Current Time is not an “about” piece, it is a thought provoking work that invites listeners to examine themselves and the ways we are manipulated in our current culture.

At the end the audience sat in silence until Timothy Beyer initiated the long applause.

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