



MISSION

The Boston New Music Initiative, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to maintaining an international network of composers, performers, conductors, directors, and champions of new music in order to generate new music concerts, compositions, collaborations, and commissions. Incorporated in 2010, the organization aims to advance the careers of its members in the field of new music by serving as a resource for networking, professional development, commissioning, collaboration, and programming.

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Boston New Music Initiative serves up a bracing array of works

April 29, 2013 at 9:31 am

By Aaron Keebaugh

Boston New Music Initiative's concert at Longy's Pickman Hall Saturday night had a little something for everyone.

Eight works for chamber ensemble by established and budding composers spanned the tonal palette where ear-bending color pieces stood alongside others imbued with lush harmonies and driving rhythms. Each came alive for guest conductor Steven Lipsitt, who led the ensemble of mostly local musicians with vigor.

The most adventurous work of the evening was Panayiotis Kokoras' *Ghost Notes*, heard in its world premiere. Known for his commissions from the Paul Fromm Foundation and Boulez's IRCAM, the Greek-born composer effectively turns winds and strings into an acoustic wind machine. The sonorities used were a literal fit for the title. With his right hand, the pianist tapped notes on the keyboard while stopping the strings inside with his left. The flutist rendered breathy phantom notes and, by work's end, was called upon to blow the instrument long ways, all with good effect. The violinist, cellist, and bassist smacked and drew their bows across limp strings. The bass clarinetist tossed out short, whining tones and squawking harmonics. And for their part, the percussionists gently brushed the surfaces of tom and snare drums to add a thin shimmering layer.

The ghost notes of *Ghost Notes* came together in a windy collage that, in the end, elegantly faded into silence. But it is hard for any composer to stretch such material for long periods of time, and Kokoras' work, though interesting, seemed to wear as it continued.

That wasn't the case with Andrew Smith's *Separation Anxiety*, a multi-sectional work for chamber orchestra filled with nervous energy.

After a raucous opening, *Separation Anxiety* broke into sparse strains of whistling violins, oscillating piano octaves, and growling flute and brass figures. The music again separated into a stabbing exchange of notes between cello and violins over a glassy texture of glissando strings. Motor percussion rhythms, played on tom-toms and bass drum, combined with piano chord clusters for a forcible close.

The equally vigorous *in-retro/re-intro:spect*, composer Emily Koh noted, describes the human process of remembering and misremembering details during self reflection. Koh's tightly-

constructed piece evolved from a punchy rhythmic motive that returned in different guises through the movement. Her writing is clean and accessible; static tonal harmonies blend with biting clashes of dissonance and pulsing rhythms. Here, Lipsitt conducted with energy, and the musicians answered with some of their sharpest playing of the evening.

Other works on the program drew upon American popular music.

Jonathan Russell's *Twelve Bean Groove Machine* was a toe-tapping minimalistic affair where popping riffs mingled into a polyrhythmic collage similar to Lyle Mays' *Overture to the Royal Mongolia Suma Foosball Festival* and other virtuosic jazz-rock numbers.

The throbbing lines of Andrew Davis' *Black Mamba* sprung from a staid opening. Davis, a composer and electric guitarist in his mid-twenties, in part, derived material for *Black Mamba* from rock'n'roll licks. I couldn't help hearing the influence of hard bop, especially when the ripping, sharply-played brass lines shouted over the fast-paced walking bass.

Gregg Wramage's *In shadows, in silence* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and percussion, also bounced with angular riffs and a jazz-like groove. Other passages in the work were more contemplative. The alto flutist and clarinetist rendered the spacious intervals at work's close with warm tone. A similarly slow-moving duet between violin and cello came off a little thin and distant. Whether or not this was intentional is hard to say.

Another world premiere, Timothy Davis' *Moments* for chamber orchestra, had the hallmarks of film and television scores. Horn and trumpet calls over a drone bass opened and closed the work, and sharp-tongued brass figures cut through the churning string ostinato in the middle section. All were cast in a diatonic style fit for a soundtrack to an *American Experience* documentary. The moving music—an expansion of his earlier *A Few Moments Later* for brass choir—well suited Davis' theme of heroism: penned over the tenth anniversary of 9/11, *Moments*, the composer stated, is dedicated to the citizens of Boston in the tragedy of last week's Marathon bombing.

The loveliest piece of the evening, David Biedenbender's *Winter Sunset* for soprano and chamber orchestra, recalled the beauties of winter (an easy thing to contemplate now that the devilish weather is behind us). The composer described *Winter Sunset*, a sampling from his song-cycle *Along the Road*, as an "icy piece" suited to William Carlos Williams' poetry. But the music also has a warming effect. The ensemble performed the stirring harmonies of the score's thick texture with an affectionate sound. Soprano Erin Smith rendered the text with a lovely, ringing voice. Her upper register felt a little forced and, at times, she seemed to settle into her pitches well after the attacks. Her middle range, though, flowed gracefully.

This performance was the final BNMI concert of the season. bostonnewmusic.org.

- See more at: <http://bostonclassicalreview.com/2013/04/boston-new-music-initiative-serves-up-a-bracing-array-of-works/#sthash.I7rObQDr.dpuf>

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Running Start, Surprising Moments in New Works

by Stefanie Lubkowski

The Boston New Music Initiative opened its third season on Saturday, October 1 at the Fenway Center at Northeastern University with a collection of works that showcased both the quality of its performers as well as the accomplishments of its composers. Ian Dicke's *Assembly Lines*, which was originally composed to go along with archival factory footage, gave this opening night concert a running start with its driven rhythms. Although this large ensemble work had an abundance of predictably ascending lines, its motivic material was enlivened by delightful orchestrations that often made reference to the sounds of 1920s jazz and popular music.

Two works combined acoustic instruments with live electronics. The first was Kyong Mee Choi's *Sublimation* for marimba and electronics. The electronic portion consisted of well-processed sharp and resonant percussion sounds that later gave way to more subtle metallic timbres. In the beginning of the piece, the marimba lines are all instigated by the jarring attacks of the electronic part, while in the second section, the two elements are in something of a disconnected counterpoint. Percussionist Jeff Stern performed with precision and an impressive attention to timbral detail; nevertheless, the piece did not offer an equally satisfying sense of cohesion.

Metamorphoses, by Clifton Callender, presented another combination of acoustic and electronic sounds. This time, a cello was subjected to various levels of delay to create a sort of canon that repeatedly built into a wash of sound. This electronic treatment has been a staple of the minimalist aesthetic for quite some time, and I was hoping that this piece would add to the tradition rather than simply re-iterating it.

Garrett Byrnes *Villanelle* concluded the first half of the concert with a return to a more linear aesthetic in which melody takes the foreground. After a nice introduction in which Byrne opened up the registral and harmonic space, the violin led the way with a lyrical line backed by harp accompaniment that acknowledged the villanelle form's Medieval roots. As the piece progressed, Byrne also made allusions to Eastern European folk music, which provided some engaging moments of sparse timbre and off-kilter harmonic rhythm. Overall, the lyrical elements dominated the piece, which resulted in a wonderfully pretty musical experience, but one without much surprise.

The second half of opening night offered two more substantial works, beginning with Michael Gandolfi's *As Above*, another work that was also originally composed for presentation with video footage. Gandolfi has a talent for layering apparently simple, rhythmic motives in such a way as to continually delight the listener with clever timbres and re-combinations of the material. *As Above* did not disappoint, and provided the audience with a satisfying sense of direction, and some surprising moments, as when a peeling away of layers revealed a jazz rhythm in the latter half of the piece.

The Boston New Music Initiative closed the concert with Chris Arrell's *Argot*, a piece for large chamber ensemble and soprano using as its text two abstract poems by e e cummings. As the evening's most modernist piece, *Argot* took the lead of the poetry and invested itself in the timbral aspects of its non-tonal harmonies and unconventional orchestrations. Each sonority, built upon phonemes lovingly rendered by soprano Kimberly Soby, were milked for all their beauty and fascination, even during the sections with sparse and agitated orchestration.

In their opening night, The Boston New Music Initiative demonstrated a commitment to new music firmly rooted in both classical and contemporary traditions. While the audience may come to the Boston New Music Initiative's season with little familiarity with the featured composers, they will certainly leave each performance with reasons to be enthusiastic about new music.

Stefanie Lubkowski is a composer and doctoral candidate at Boston University. She is very active in the Boston new music scene and sits on the board of the New Gallery Concert Series.

TEXTURES

new works by

Linda ANTAS

Mike BARNETT

Kyong Mee CHOI

Charles HALKA

Sungji HONG

Ingrid STÖLZEL

Dale TRUMBORE

10.31.2013 – 8 pm

Ryles Jazz Club

212 Hampshire St, Cambridge, MA

\$10 seniors, students, full members

\$15 at the door

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