

THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011
NEW MUSIC SCOTLAND
SUNDAY CONCERTS
JOHNSTON HALL & THE LEMON TREE
Sunday, 23 October 2011

An enthralling and mind expanding (or should I say ear expanding) morning and early afternoon of events to conclude the New Music Scotland Weekend hosted by Sound began with a live performance by Mústek, pianist Lauren Sarah Hayes and drummer Christos Michalakos. Socks and Ammo (I don't really get the significance of the title) was nevertheless an enthralling musical experience. Advanced techniques on piano (strings plucked or scraped etc.) and drum kit (cymbals bowed, drum rims struck etc.) were enhanced or blended using laptops controlled by the performers by means of cables fixed to their hands. As one person suggested, she thought to begin with that the drummer was ill and had a drip fitted to his arm.

The sounds created by the live instruments initially sounded like pure electro-acoustic music but as the piece progressed their purely acoustic properties were revealed (piano keys played traditionally etc.). What was truly impressive in this performance was firstly the way in which every element of the performance whether acoustic or electronic was so completely integrated together to form a true unity of sound. Secondly, only from the programme did we realise that much of this music was improvised but like the best of jazz musicians who seem in a positively supernatural way to be able to read one another's minds, this duo thought and performed as one entity.

What followed were four pure electro-acoustic pieces by the three members of Edit-Point, a new group of composers dedicated to the dissemination and performance of electro-acoustic music, plus Graeme Truslove, a composer and performer based in Glasgow.

I particularly liked and responded to Louise Rossiter's Breaking Point perhaps because elements of traditional classical music were clearly discernable in her composition: a clear division into seven movements with recall of themes also clearly discernable and an echo of counterpoint in the way in which her different sound components were layered above one another and her movement of sounds round the auditorium was particularly appropriate and well done.

It was certainly coincidental that *κακτος* by Timothy Cooper and Organic Construct by Matthew Whiteside inhabited, at least initially, a similar sound world: pianissimo, delicate, liquid and with a sense of rotational or mechanical motion within the sounds because they were derived very differently indeed, but why not? After all, the opening of Pimen's dialogue in Boris Godunov by Mussorgsky and the introduction to the second song in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, *Der Einsame im Herbst*, sound remarkably similar but otherwise have nothing at all in common. So we can simply accept that electro-acoustic music has like classical music its own individual palette of possible sounds and combinations.

Far more powerful or put more simply louder was Graeme Truslove's piece Portals. Jet planes, explosions and a drum solo were all suggested but was this what the composer intended? The programme did not give us a clue.

Upstairs in two separate rooms in Johnston Hall were two installations. Patrick M Keenan's 4M used as its sound source e-mails which were coming into his laptop. A rather beautiful and hypnotic sound experience I would have been glad to have some more information on how exactly this was achieved but perhaps like the recipe for Coca Cola, it is a trade secret.

James Wyness's four compositions entitled zenconcrète was a particularly apt title. Listening to this music was the auditory equivalent of a stroll through a lovely Japanese Zen garden, relaxing and highly restorative on a very hectic weekend.

Hectic was probably the best description of Buffalo x 5 in which cassette recorders and a set of instructions the total impact of which amounted to "do anything you like" were handed to the audience. The result was a fascinating cacophony of sounds which would probably have made Charles Ives's head explode. Most interesting though were the responses of the audience members whether alone or together or in different groups. Is there anyone working on the psychology of audience behaviour? If so a recording on sound and video of this event would probably provide at least ten years of work and a certain doctorate at the end.

In order to be sure of a parking space I left before the end and went to hear Mr McFall's Chamber with Norwegian master percussionist Thomas Strønen. If the Buffalos had a strong element of randomness within, this performance in the Lemon Tree was the very essence of exactness and control. Mr McFall's Chamber gave us a full string orchestra with each section pared down to one player: Claire Stirling (violin), Brian Schiele (viola), Su-a Lee (cello) and Rick Standley (bass). In the opening piece the strings began before Thomas Strønen entered with a beautifully clean and delicate performance enhanced with the use of electronic delay and repeats. The violin and cello performed a piece by Grieg, originally for hardanger fiddle thus referring to this year's Nordic theme for Sound. I sensed a certain influence of Indian music in Strønen's minimalist inspired compositions but above all, what impressed was the crystal clarity and delicacy of his performance.