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Experimental Sounds, Soothed by the Waves

By ZACHARY WOOLFE

Looking at a concert program on Friday and seeing that the opening work was by Charles Wuorinen, I was expecting the thorny, dense style — fascinating but difficult to penetrate—that is his trademark.

But the 2007 piece, “Ave Maria, Virgo Serena (on Josquin)” for clarinet, violin, cello and piano was simpler and even sweeter than the work on which it was based, Josquin des Prez’s great Renaissance motet. The scoring for clarinet, played by Benjamin Fingland, gave the noble melody a lilting quality; there were moments that this 12-tone master seemed to be channeling Copland.

Any disorientation came not from the music but from the bobbing concert hall itself. For this recital was taking place at BargeMusic, the venerable floating chamber-music space moored next to the Brooklyn Bridge. Mr. Wuorinen’s piece was surprisingly steady and even; its backdrop, with the sun setting magnificently behind the downtown skyline, was sometimes queasily not.

The concert featured the adventurous new-music ensemble counter)induction, which includes a virtuosic quintet of instrumentalists and three composers. Friday’s program, organized by the group’s pianist, Steven Beck, included works by two of its resident composers, Kyle Bartlett and Douglas Boyce, alongside more eminent names: not just Mr. Wuorinen but also Milton Babbitt, Mario Davidovsky and Louis Karchin.

Ms. Bartlett’s haunting memoryscape “Tombeau. Tattoo. Tether.” (2011) sampled recordings of her grandmother’s voice — “I can remember,” she says at one point, heartbreakingly — under an insistent, even defiant violin line, played by the fearless Miranda Cuckson. Sometimes the violin’s melody seemed to be slipping, but, as the title suggests, it remained stubbornly tethered, holding on as the sounds and memories shifted.

Ms. Cuckson joined Mr. Beck for Mr. Karchin's Rhapsody for Violin and Piano (2010), which alternated cascading lines with periods of deep calm; there was a memorable moment toward the end when the key shifted, and the sun suddenly seemed to come out.

The excellent cellist Sumire Kudo brought to Mr. Davidovsky's aggressive but never angry "Synchronism No. 3" (1964) an astonishing range of colors, from harsh plucks to moody low notes. She blended uncannily well with the accompanying electronic sounds, twinklings and buzzings that seemed almost organic, like jungle bird calls. Ms. Kudo was joined by Ms. Cuckson, Mr. Beck and the violist Jessica Meyer for Mr. Boyce's Piano Quartet No. 1 (2008), in which slowly shifting string textures led to more violent passages, working themselves out through juxtapositions of restless rhythms and more lyrical gestures.

The concert ended as it opened, with one of Mr. Wuorinen's sublime quartet versions of early music. "Christes Crosse (After Thomas Morley)," like the Josquin arrangement, was written for the recent reunion tour of the legendary new-music ensemble Tashi, and it exuded a sense of happily coming together. The group played with freewheeling, rhythmically angular exhilaration. It was a party.