

BRIAN CURRENT

Composer

Review

SNS evoked water, sunlight

Stephen Pedersen, Halifax Chronicle-Herald
March 14, 2009

...the music was hot Thursday night coming off the stage of the Cohn. With Bernard Gueller on the podium and accordion virtuoso Joseph Petric on a raised platform in front of the first desk of first violins, Symphony Nova Scotia gave the world premiere performance of Brian Current's Accordion Concerto.

Current's music is amazing. His control over orchestral colour and detail and his utterly convincing sense of design and proportion rein in the chaotic energy of 21st century art music's eclectic vocabulary.

If you were to watch a wave atomizing itself on the rocks at Peggy's Cove, Current would be your man to make you feel in music what it is like to be inside that bursting cloud of sea vapour.

"Composers are trying to tell us what it feels like to be alive at this time and in this place," Current told the audience just before the downbeat to his Concerto. What it feels like, to Current, is a crowded canvas of sound images organized within a global view, a shape derived from a distant viewpoint, as from an airplane, then zoomed in to an ever spreading display of detail.

He provided that image in a lecture about his approach to form which he gave to Jerome Blais's Dalhousie Music Department composition class Wednesday afternoon.

He also mentioned clues for listeners to his music in terms of gesture and shape, and a texture of water and sunlight. The way the accordion danced over the slow movement with the orchestra playing slowly, as well as the sprays of sparkling figures in the woodwinds came closest to an almost cinematic experience of the water-and-sunlight imagery.

The music periodically rose to ear-splitting climaxes sweeping all before it like a rogue wave, and ebbed away into nearly complete silence.

In all this the accordion could be perfectly heard, which is a miracle both of the writing and Gueller's extraordinarily skillful balance of forces.

Petric is an old hand at making contemporary music sing. He has an unusual insight into how to clarify and project detail, as well as a superb sense of rhythmic design, most vividly shown in a third movement duet with percussionist Terry O'Mahoney on African djembe.

After three non-stop movements the music evaporated into the delicate mists of the natural harmonics of the overtone series, diaphanous and unearthly...

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Excerpts from Reviews

Brian Current toyed with speeds and textures, using the orchestra in much the same way that a precomputer electronic musician might use a tape deck. Different sections played at different tempos. Occasionally, almost from nowhere, a brief passage of straightforward symphonic chords would emerge and then dissolve into the changeable fabric.

—Allan Kozinn, The New York Times

The varied creativity of young Toronto whippersnapper Brian Current is on vivid display in five substantial orchestral works...There is never a dull sound, and many sublime moments.

—Toronto Star

The voice of an original composer with something important to say could be clearly heard...The composer lives in Toronto; he is worth watching, even from afar.

—Allan Rich, L.A Weekly

Music may never have sounded quite so intoxicating.

—Michael Clive, The Villager (New York)

Tremendously stimulating music...a composer with an ear for texture that can delight as well as overwhelm.

— Colin Clarke, Fanfare

Brian Current writes cutting-edge music that combines traditional and avant-garde playing techniques, all manner of tonality, and terrific imagination.

—Barry Kilpatrick, American Record Guide

Reminiscent of a young Ligeti, there is unrelenting activity in Current's orchestrations; combined with his notion of 'slanted time', the listener is provided with a continuously exhilarating journey.

—Wallace Halladay, Wholenote

A full orchestra winding itself up and racing through the curves, with a mad shifting profusion of detail in the scoring, was a miraculous apparition.

—Robert Everett-Green, the Globe and Mail (Toronto)

[Current] actually came closer to insanity than Lara but in the happiest of ways. The solo violin writing, spectacularly played by Movses Pogossian, is sort of Paganini on LSD. Fun is to be had if you have a strong stomach and really good players.

— Mark Swed, Los Angeles Times